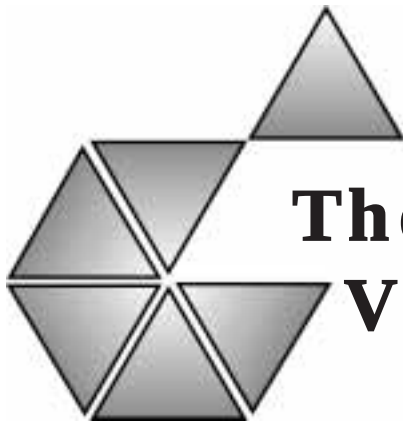




The Manager as Visionary Strategist

4

**Strengthening the Management of
Local Self Government
in Slovakia**

The future for us, too, is in our own place, if we can learn to see it differently, and are 'strong in will' to change it.

- Charles Handy

FOREWORD

It has been said that the only certainty in management today is the certainty of change. Unquestionably, the concepts and strategies of management are among the fastest moving targets. They are rapidly changing for a variety of reasons. First, there is competition for scarce resources, particularly in the public domain. This means that managers are constantly challenged to do more with less. Second, demands by customers (and citizens) for better service, higher quality goods, more responsive and open organizations continue to grow. From my perspective, there is little difference between the meaning of the terms *customers* and *citizens*. The adoption and implementation of the concept of *customer* by many progressive local government managers is a good example of how management concepts and strategies change with the times. Third, the increasing speed and ease of communicating new management ideas and their use in the market place have been no less than phenomenal in the past few years. For example, to engage in a bit of instant research on the latest managerial fads, all you need to do is tap into the Internet and the myriad of management related web sites.

Finally, management, both private and public, has become a “legitimate” profession. This means, among other things, that the tools of the profession, management concepts and strategies, are constantly being refined and redefined in the hands of those who research and write about them and by those who use them. In fact, it is almost impossible in this rapidly changing discipline to know where the new ideas come from. Do they emanate from the halls of academia, research institutes and the growing ranks of management consultants who need new wares to market? Or do they originate with aggressive and innovative operating organizations, the users of management concepts, strategies and ideas?

SLOVAK CONTEXT FOR THE TRAINING SERIES

The Local Self Government Assistance Center, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has as one of its major program objectives the strengthening of in-country training capacity to serve local government's development needs. The fulfillment of this objective includes the development of training materials, training of trainers, and further improvement in the management of local government training services. These activities are embodied within the larger LSGAC goal to help Slovakia's local governments be more effective, responsive and accountable in service to their citizens. The *Strengthening the Management of Local Self Government in Slovakia* workbook series, therefore, is intended to help local governments achieve higher

levels of performance through new and improved management principles and practices gained through on the job learning.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

For public managers in Slovakia (among them the elected mayors and deputies as well as city managers, department heads and directors of public service organizations), the task of learning new approaches to public management, and putting the learning into practice, is daunting. You and your organization have been thrust into the heart of a country-wide paradigm shift of political, economic and social values and norms. For local governments, these changes have created a host of new problems, but also the potential to pursue new opportunities. Given the dynamic and changing nature of your work environment, this series focuses on concepts and strategies that can help you mold your local government organization to deal more effectively with the political, economic and social changes that are sweeping your country and region.

We have picked a few core topics and competencies we believe are central to your current challenges and demands as local public managers and leaders. Consequently, this series of short learning experiences is not a comprehensive course in managerial theories and strategies. No effort has been made to go back to the early *basics* of management theory that have often set the stage for many contemporary management ideas and fads. Nor was an attempt made to explore all the new schools of management thinking that consume meters of space in full-service book stores in London and elsewhere. Rather, this series is, more modestly, an attempt to help you gain managerial insights and skills in a few targeted areas of managerial practice so you can increase the effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of your local government organization, as assessed by the citizens you serve.

To reach the goal intended for the *Strengthening the Management of Local Self Government in Slovakia* workbook series, I decided to return to the *Guide for Managing Change for Urban Managers and Trainers*, a workbook I wrote several years ago for the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). The workbook has been substantially altered and updated with the help of an able and experienced Slovak advisory team and David Tees, a colleague I rely upon more and more in crafting learning materials for practitioners in the public service.

EXPECTATIONS

Here is a brief overview of what you can expect from the *Strengthening the Management of Local Self Government in Slovakia* workbook series. Workbook #1, *The Evolving Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Government Manager* and Workbook #2, *The Manager and Organization Culture* are based on concepts from which the users of these materials might benefit: 1) local government

management roles and how they have evolved over the last few decades, particularly in the United States and other Western countries; and, 2) organization cultures, how they are invented and how they can be changed to better serve the changing mandates of local governments as keystone institutions in building open and democratic societies. These workbooks are designed to lay the groundwork for planning and managing organization change as defined in Workbook #3.

The core learning module, Workbook #3, *The Manager as Organization Change Agent*, focuses on concepts and strategies associated with the planning and management of changes within organizations and their immediate environments. While much has been written about organization development and planned change, they are still relevant and important topics for discussion. This module, in a metaphorical sense, will be wrapped around another set of LSGAC supported training materials. These are the skill development workshops on *Consulting Skills* which focus, in more depth, on two phases of the organization change process, contracting and data collection and analysis.

Workbook #4, *The Manager as Visionary Strategist*, addresses the issues and processes associated with strategic planning. To many, strategic planning is an ally of the planned change process. To others, it is an overlapping intrusion. Nevertheless, strategic planning is a potentially valuable tool for planning the future of your community. As Tom Cannon reminds us, in his book, *Welcome to the Revolution*, “Managers are craftsmen and strategy is their clay.. ..like the potter, they sit between the past of capabilities and the future of opportunities.”

Finally, some insights are offered on *The Manager as Staff Developer* (Workbook #5). The conceptual framework used to describe the institution building role of the manager assumes the manager should use different management styles based on the work situation. Since this approach to leadership styles focuses, in large measure, on the maturity (development) of the work force to determine the appropriate management response to most situations, it offers insights into the potential for staff and organization development. We will also look at the growing use of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental teams as essential to achieving high performance within complex organizations.

THANKS TO MANY WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE

Many individuals and organizations have contributed to this effort. These training materials were originally written under the sponsorship of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the guidance of Dr. Tomasz Sudra, Chief, Training and Capacity Building. This revision is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and managed by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) through its affiliate, the Local Self Government Assistance Center (LSGAC) in Bratislava, Slovakia. LSGAC, initiated and funded by USAID, is devoted to strengthening local governments in Slovakia through capacity building endeavors with local support institutions.

These Slovak support institutions include: the Foundation for Training in Self Government of the Slovak Republic; the Regional (Local Self Government) Training Centers; the Slovakia City Managers Association; the School of Public Administration, Academia Istropolitana, and the newly established Association for Management Training and Development. In the development of this series, special thanks go to Dr. Anastazia Kozakova, who directed the local advisory committee, and to the team of experts she assembled to provide their insights and good judgment. They included: city managers Jana Blazejova, Jan Dreisig, Richard Hojer, and Maria Pfliegelova; management trainers Stefania Hrivnakova, Daniela Halasova and Luba Vavrova; and, Peter Bercik, an advisor to the Slovak Ministry of Interior. Holly Ingram provided an invaluable service as layout and design artist and computer specialist in transmitting complex documents via the Internet. I want to recognize the invaluable contribution of Luba Vavrova, my colleague at LSGAC. Without her continuing assistance, the development of these training materials would not have been possible. And of course, thanks to my colleague, David Tees, University of Texas at Arlington, who provided valuable inputs to the development of learning exercises for the series.

In my short stay in Slovakia, I have come to appreciate the valuable contributions that mayors, city managers and other senior local government officials are making to secure an open and democratic society for their citizens. I hope this series of management materials will help you perform your roles and responsibilities in strengthening local self-governments to be more effective, responsive and accountable.

Fred Fisher
Bratislava, Slovakia 1998

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this workbook is to offer a learning experience for managers in creating shared visions for their organizations and setting into motion an on-going process for moving their organizations purposefully into the future. The workbook is designed to demonstrate the importance of continuous planning and creative thinking by managers who wish to succeed in aligning their organizations with the challenges ahead. We have made several assumptions in writing this particular workbook:

- Every organization has a destiny, and the search for its destiny is what distinguishes the creative organization from the reactive one.
- Managers have a central responsibility for the search and can fulfill this responsibility by acquiring a deeper understanding of the present and by creating a compelling image of the future.
- At the heart of creating and pursuing a vision of the future is an on-going process (strategic planning) in which people inside and outside the organization can have a part.

Each of the workbooks in this series includes: (1) concepts and strategies on the specific topic being covered; (2) reflection exercises to help you think about your own experience in relation to the written materials; and, (3) training designs for group learning. The materials covered in this particular workbook will be offered in a 3-day workshop for either management teams from various local governments or individual managers in skill development workshops.

The workshops will be organized by the Foundation for Training in Self Government in collaboration with the Slovakia City Managers Association on the topic covered by this workbook and others in the series.

A special resource concludes this workbook. It consists of a sample program design to help managers who wish to facilitate a strategic planning process in another local government organization.

This and other workbooks in the series include materials and activities, repeated as many times as necessary to cover specific concepts and ideas as presented. They include:

- Trainer's notes: describing trainer assisted learning events and the Trainer's role;
- Concept materials with reflection exercises for use by participants; and,
- Self-assessment questionnaires or task sheets to be used by the training participants as individual and group learning exercises.

In most of the workbooks, this sequence of events is repeated several times. The intent of the layout is to provide the trainers and individual learners with the full set of learning materials that can be used in whatever way seems most appropriate and effective.

*Where There Is No Vision,
The People Perish
– Proverbs*

MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Before going any further, we feel the need to comment on *The Manager as Visionary Strategist* — the title we have given this learning experience. We have selected this set of words, in combination, for several reasons. While this learning module is primarily about the process of strategic planning, and we see the manager's role in this process as central to its success, we also *en-vision* the role of the local government manager as encompassing some very special responsibilities. Responsibilities that require the knowledge, skills, values and, yes, temperament of the *visionary strategist*. John Gardner, a much respected author and public servant, in his book *On Leadership*, says,

“One of the most commonly expressed requirements for leadership is vision, which can mean a variety of things: that they think longer term; that they see where their system fits in a larger context; that they can describe the outlines of a possible future that moves and lifts people; or that they actually discern, in the clutter and confusion of the present, the elements that determine what is to come.”¹

Or to say it a bit differently, the visionary strategist takes a futuristic, big picture, “out of the box” (free of conventional thinking) perspective.

Before we delve into the process of strategic planning (as a way of making visionary and strategic qualities concrete), let's go back and review some ideas put forth in two previous workbooks: Number 1: *The Emerging Roles and Responsibilities of the Local Government Manager*; and, Number 2: *The Manager as Organization Change Agent*.

THE ICMA PERSPECTIVE

In the workbook on emerging roles and responsibilities, the International City/County Management Association outlined a long and complex set of individual practices local government managers should be able to implement if they are to be effective in their role. Group 4 of these practices is identified as *Strategic Leadership*. That's where we find some of the individual competencies relating to the *visionary strategist* responsibilities we will be discussing in this workbook. These include:

- ***Initiative and Risk Taking:*** resisting the status quo and removing stumbling blocks that delay progress toward goals and objectives.

- **Vision:** conceptualizing an ideal future state and communicating it to the organization and community.
- **Creativity and Innovation:** developing new ideas or practices; applying existing ideas and practices to new situations.

To these we suggest three more practices from the Democratic Responsiveness Group:

- **Democratic Advocacy:** fostering the values and integrity of representative government and local democracy through action and example; ensuring the effective participation of local government in the intergovernmental system.
- **Citizen Participation:** recognizing the right of citizens to influence local decisions and promoting active citizen involvement in local governance.
- **Diversity:** understanding and valuing the differences among individuals and fostering these values throughout the organization and community.

And finally, another from *Organization Planning and Management*, one that defines the more common managerial practice associated with the role of *visionary strategist*:

- **Strategic Planning:** positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future.

Perhaps you are wondering why we have included some of the above practices as associated with the roles of *visionary strategist*? For example, those from the category *Democratic Responsiveness*. We believe all of the *Democratic Responsiveness* practices are either sufficiently new to Slovakia local self-government or in need of new visions and strategies to make them effective mandates.

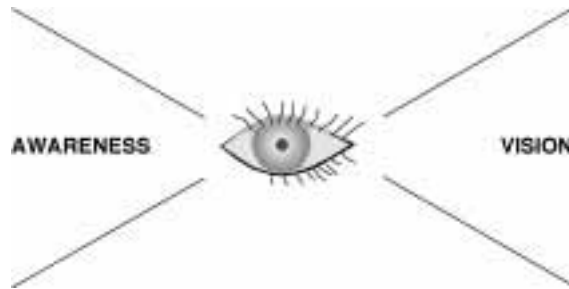
Before moving on to the change agent role, we suggest you reread the strategic planning statement from the ICMA Practices listed above. *As a visionary strategist, would you consider changing the statement to better reflect the complexity and challenges of this role?* We will return to this question later and share our own thoughts about it.

THE CHANGE AGENT ROLE

From the manager's role as *Organization Change Agent* (Workbook 3), the tactic on awareness and vision provides more clues about how to hone your knowledge and skills as a visionary strategist. In that discussion, we made a distinction between *problems* and *opportunities* and then linked these to the knowledge, skills and other personal attributes associated with *awareness* and *vision*. First, a look at *opportunities*.

- *Opportunities* require a *pro-active* style of management.
- *Opportunities* are focused on development, be it economic, social, physical or political.
- *Opportunities* live in the future, and the risks must be calculated against a future not always predictable.
- *Opportunities* require foresight — a vision about what can be.
- When tapping *opportunities*, the critical question is, *What if?*

Tapping opportunities and solving problems, as managers, begin with the basic *awareness* that something is wrong (or about to be) and a *vision* that things could be better than they are. Both *awareness* and *vision* involve many things: *insights* (seeing things that are not obvious to others); *perspective* (looking at things from different points of view); *intuition* (hunches from our collective experiences that are lingering somewhere in our subconscious library); *increasing our peripheral vision*.



While *awareness* and *vision* ride some common brain waves, they are also quantitatively and qualitatively different as managerial tools required to bring about organizational changes.

The *visionary*, someone who exercises vision in a managerial/leadership role:

- has a long range, *strategic perspective*.
- paints the big picture.
- operates from *foresight* (what's over the horizon?) and *en-visioning* (seeing a future that is not yet invented).
- *diverges* from the tradition worn path (in other words, thinks "outside the box").
- *transcends* the immediate environment in thinking about opportunities for the organization and community.
- engages in *conceptual* thinking.

You may be wondering what the difference is between the *change agent* role and that of the *visionary strategist*. Fundamentally, both require many of the same managerial skills and attributes, but the focus is different. The *change agent* role is more operational, solving immediate problems and tapping available opportunities. Of course, we hope these activities, when you engage in them, will always be framed within the context of bringing about long term, planned change within the organization and community.

By contrast, the *visionary strategist* role is focused on future states of being, not immediate operational issues and concerns. For example, what will the *character* of your organization and community be in five or ten years, or even longer time frames? What *values* will they reflect? Will the visions and strategies, and the mission and goals reflected by your elected leaders and management team at this time remain viable (flexible and adaptive), competitive and responsive beyond your tenure of public service?

Since the *visionary strategist* role is, more often than not, associated with the process of *strategic planning* (as an operational strategy), most of what we have to say from now on will focus on this process. Strategic planning as a policy and management tool has been used in all sectors of organized society (public, private, and NGOs) over the past few decades. But, not without controversy. Because the process has been so common, and yet controversial as a policy, development and management tool, we think a short history lesson might be useful.

Before we get into the history of strategic planning, we want to return to a question we asked you earlier about ICMA's description of *strategic planning* (in the long list of practices expected from the contemporary local government manager). If you recall, ICMA defines the strategic planning process as "*positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future.*"

While we think this is a very logical way of approaching strategic planning, the *visionary strategist* will also be thinking about how to cope with unanticipated future events. These are the events that drive planners, and managers who plan, a bit mad, and often result in unanticipated changes in elected and appointed leadership. We suggest you give this notion of *unanticipated* future events a bit of reflection before we consider the history of planning in a more strategic fashion.

REFLECTION

Think about your own career in local government, recall a time when it would have been to your advantage, and the organization's, to have "anticipated" an unanticipated future event. Examples might include the so-called velvet revolution; the opening up of capital markets to support long-term investments; or others more directly associated with the life of your community. Record in the following space an event that has happened since (that was, at the beginning of your local government leadership career, *unanticipated*). Record how the future could have been different had you been more of a *visionary strategist* at the time.

[illegible]

What's past is prologue.
– William Shakespeare

STRATEGIC PLANNING FROM A HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

A recent article in the *Training and Development* Journal stated quite emphatically that "strategic planning is back." The article's sub-title went on to say "out of favor for a decade, strategic planning is back in vogue, but with some important differences." The article recorded the latest twist in the life of a policy and management process that has had its ups and downs over the years but somehow refuses to die.² The staying power of strategic planning is largely in its ability to reinvent itself, to keep current with changing times and demands. Despite its roller coaster past, strategic planning as a managerial and policy tool is worth keeping and using under certain circumstances. However, the pretext and context that have driven the strategic planning process in the past is in need of change. Given the historian's admonition, *to know the past is to understand the present*, we want to take you on a short journey, relating the high-ways and by-ways of "strategic planning."

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IS NOT STRATEGIC PLANNING, BUT STRATEGIC PLANNING IS CRITICAL TO DEVELOPMENT

First, and foremost, strategic planning is not development planning, as reflected in those five-year political statements that were ubiquitous in the development process in this and other parts of the world. In the United States, we called them *comprehensive plans*. Any local government expecting to get national funding for capital projects in the 1960s and early seventies had to have such a plan.

Development planning, as a national statement of proclaimed progress, was a vehicle for allocating scarce resources for long-term investments. The plans were typically stylized, formalistic, even ritualistic, global statements of interest that, more often than not, had little to do with day-to-day operations, or current reality. They were based on predictions and forecasts. They spelled out goals for which there was often little hope of, or resources for, accomplishment. Development planning was, in some countries, the context and rationale for building monumental white elephants to honor political leaders and fading dogma.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AS MANAGEMENT

Strategic planning, on the other hand, is a management strategy with worthier intent and realistic expectations. Or, at least, we would hope so. As a policy and managerial tool it, strategic planning is not new, nor has its use been

bound by culture or geopolitical boundaries. Over the centuries, great leaders have engaged in strategic planning (or what we would rather call *strategic thinking*) although we suspect these leaders didn't think of it in such management-laden terms. Mao Tse-Tung, Napoleon, and Alexander The Great are all remembered for their phenomenal accomplishments. They not only planned strategically, they managed to carry out their strategic plans. (By contrast, how many contemporary leaders will be remembered for their five year development plans?)

When Philip of Macedonia and his son Alexander (who went on to be known as Alexander The Great) planned a *strategy* to rid their homeland of influence by the Greek city-state in the third century BC, they engaged in the kind of thinking and tactics that are very much a part of the rhetoric we hear today from those who write about strategic planning. For example, Philip and Alexander *set goals, built coalitions, assessed the relative strengths and weaknesses of different alternatives, used training as a tool to develop the human resources they needed to expand their empire, and put together contingency plans*. The strategic thinking and planning Philip and Alexander engaged in over 2000 years ago gives our topic a rich and timeless historical perspective.

FAST FORWARD TO THE NINETEEN SIXTIES

Strategic planning, often referred to as long-range planning, became an expected responsibility of public officials, corporate executives, and yes, socialist functionaries in the nineteen sixties and seventies. And they, in turn, discharged this responsibility by turning it over to a growing cadre of professional planners. It mattered not whether the planning process was being conducted in public or private organizations, socialist or capitalist domains, planners were largely in charge. While they were, by and large, competent in their profession, as it was defined at the time, the long-term results of their efforts were often minimal. The intended influence and success of these planners was often diminished by the exclusive authority they commandeered over their dubious domain. The potential for successful implementation of strategic and long range plans during that era was frequently diminished by the lack of greater participation in their development.

In addition to the limited "ownership" dilemma, there was the infatuation with quantitative data and the use of models for manipulating data. Peter Drucker, even at that point in time an international management icon, cautioned that strategic planning was not a box of tricks, a bundle of techniques. While "model building or simulation may be useful," Drucker counseled, "they are not strategic planning."³

Russell Ackoff, who was also writing about strategic/corporate planning at that time, came to distrust the use, or misuse, of data as the core ingredient in the planning process. While he started his academic career in operations research and quantitative sciences, Ackoff gradually moved away from these more precise roots to become a firm skeptic of management information

systems. Some might say his intellectual enthusiasm swung too far the other way as he began to advocate such concepts as "mess management" a process that deals with "systems" of problems. When we try to unravel the messes, or to desegregate them, which often happens in attempts to quantify them, Ackoff believes they lose their essential properties. "For strategic planning to work it must deal with the mess as a whole and with the interaction that created the mess. The most critical need of managers is not *more relevant information* but *less irrelevant information*."⁴

AS THE BLOOM FADED FROM THE PLANNING PROCESS

James Quinn is another scholar who shared, earlier in his career, the view that more formal and rational planning structures could improve decision making in large organizations. While he believed there were obvious benefits to be derived from the process, he also noticed some disturbing tendencies. From his in-depth survey of nine large multi-national corporations and their planning process in the late 1970s, he began to gain a different perspective about the use and misuses of strategic planning.⁵

First, the formal planning activities carried out by these organizations often tended to become bureaucratized, rigid and costly paper shuffling exercises. Second, Quinn found that most major strategy decisions seemed to be made outside the formal planning structure, even in those organizations with well accepted and established planning processes. When large expenditures were made to plan the future direction of the corporations, the products of the formal planning process were ignored.

In place of the formal planning process, which relied heavily on planners and sophisticated economic and social technology, Quinn saw something quite different happening in the name of strategic, or corporate planning. In those organizations he studied, the full strategy was rarely written down and the processes used to arrive at a corporate, or strategic plan, were typically fragmented, evolutionary and largely intuitive. "The real strategy," according to Quinn, "tends to evolve as internal decisions and external events flow together to create a new, widely shared consensus for action among key members of the top management team."⁶

To add legitimacy to what Quinn was saying about strategic planning at the time, Henry Mintzberg, an enduring management sage over the years, wrote the highly acclaimed book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. He spent much of the book showing how badly companies and organizations had been managing the strategic planning process. In his view, managers "confuse real vision with the manipulation of numbers."⁷

Strategic planning was redefined during that period as a managerial and policy (political) process: one requiring continuous learning, intense interaction between those who control the resources and those who need them, and the on-going examination of underlying values and basic assumptions that drive the enterprise.

ADAPTIVE PLANNING

A variation of strategic planning evolved from the managerial discontent with strategic planning in the late nineteen seventies and early eighties. Although this new approach to planning (called *adaptive planning*) never became a mainstream process in corporations and public agencies, its main characteristics helped to better define strategic planning as a viable management tool. Let's look at several of adaptive planning's more redeeming features:

1. The principal value of adaptive planning does not lie in the plans that it produces but in the process of producing them. From this follows the notion that effective planning cannot be done for policy makers and managers, it must be done by them.
2. Adaptive planning recognizes that our knowledge of the future falls into three categories: a) certainty; b) uncertainty; and c) ignorance. Each of these requires a different kind of planning. When certain aspects of the future are virtually certain (e.g., increased levels of pollution), we should carry out *commitment* planning. When there are aspects of the future we are relatively certain are uncertain (e.g., shifting patterns of drought), then we should engage in *contingency* planning — the "what if" kind of getting ready to exploit the future when it makes up its mind.
3. Finally, there are things about the future that we cannot anticipate (e.g., political catastrophes or technological breakthroughs). While we cannot prepare for them directly, we can do so indirectly through *responsiveness* planning. This kind of planning directs its attention to designing organizations and management systems that can more quickly detect deviations from the expected and respond to them more effectively. Responsiveness planning builds into the system a greater ability to detect the subtle nuances of change and prepares the organization to be more responsible and flexible in its operating behavior. Certainly, a role cut out for the *visionary strategist*!

*Seek wisdom, not knowledge.
Knowledge is of the past,
wisdom is of the future.
— Lumbee, A Native American tribe*

REFLECTION

Take a moment or two and reflect about your own perceptions of the role of planning in Slovakia over the past three decades or so. Record in the space below some aspects of the planning process that contributed to the country's development over the years (and could be used at the local level of government to support development) and some things that might have been done differently in efforts to foster social, physical and economic development.

[illegible]

STRATEGIC PLANNING: BASED ON CURRENT HISTORY

We want to conclude this historical journey of planning process by referring to two contemporary authors. Patricia Galagan declares that "strategic planning is back" and substantiates her claim by referring to a 1997 survey by the Association of Management Consulting Firms. The Association found strategic planning to be the number one management issue at that time. Furthermore, strategic planning was predicted to continue to dominate its client's concerns for consultancy assistance for the next five years. So, those who hire management consultants have reaffirmed their faith in the strategic planning process.⁸

Gary Hamel, while sounding a more radical note about the past and future of this thing we are calling strategic planning, nevertheless confirms the role and importance of the *visionary strategist*. Says Hamel: "Strategy is revolution, everything else is tactics." As for the usual brand of strategic planning, "it's a calendar driven ritual, reducing complexity to the same simple written rules, assuming the future will be the same as the past with a few minor embellishments, and rarely challenges conventional wisdom." Moreover, Hamel contends, the process draws only on the brain power at the top of the organization where the thinking is so similar they "can finish each others sentences."

Among the principles Hamel says will help organizations liberate their revolutionary spirit and increase their chances of discovering truly revolutionary strategies are the following:

- ***Strategic planning isn't strategic.*** (Organizations fail to distinguish planning from strategizing. "Giving planners responsibilities for creating strategy is like asking a bricklayer to create Michelangelo's Pieta.")
- ***Strategic planning must be subversive.*** ("Revolutionaries are subversive, but their goal is not subversion. What the defenders of orthodoxy see as subversiveness, the champions of new thinking see as enlightenment.")
- ***The bottleneck is at the top of the bottle.*** In other words, to be a visionary strategist it may require managers to think like workers, or citizens or anyone but top managers. In other words, stepping outside the box of the role.

- ***Change is not a problem; engagement is.*** The objective is not to get people to support change but to give them responsibility for engendering change, some control over their destiny. As Hamel says, "you must engage the revolutionaries, wherever they are in your organization, in a dialogue about the future."
- ***Strategy making must be democratic.*** To help revolutionary strategies emerge, senior managers must supplement the hierarchy of experience (and position) with the hierarchy of imagination. Democracy is not simply about the right to be heard; it is about the opportunity to influence opinion and action. It is about being impatient and impassioned, informed and involved.⁹

The real power of democracy is that not only the elite can shape the agenda. (It might be helpful to go back and review the ICMA Practices under Democratic Responsiveness.)

- ***You can't see the end from the beginning.*** A strategy-making process that involves a broad section of the organization and community, delves deeply into discontinuities and competencies, and encourages those engaged to escape the usual conventions that constrain their thinking will inevitably reach surprising conclusions.

Creating visions of future states for your community and organization, and thinking and acting strategically about how these visions can be implemented are important management and leadership mandates. As public leaders, you owe it to your constituents and colleagues to stop and take a fresh look at where you are and en-vision where you want to go. And, as Hamel says, to do it together.

AN EXERCISE IN "OUTSIDE THE BOX" THINKING¹⁰

We have referred on several occasions about the ability to "think outside the box," suggesting it is a valuable management tool. We have also made the assumption that everyone might understand what this expression means. Rather than try to explain it further, here is an exercise that will test your out of the box thinking abilities.

*Anthony and Cleopatra are lying dead on the floor. The window is open.
There is glass and water on the floor. Explain how Anthony and Cleopatra died.*



DID YOU GET IT?

Anthony and Cleopatra are goldfish; well, they were goldfish. Their bowl, which was sitting on the window sill, was blown to the floor by a gust of wind which came through the open window. If you were like us, in trying to unravel this puzzle, you undoubtedly were trying to remember your Roman history, among other things. Our first tendency is to assume that Anthony and Cleopatra are people, special individuals who died from asps and poison and the like. In other words, we apply our own knowledge and recollections as they relate to these two characters in order to solve the puzzle. It is only when we step outside that box of assumptions and knowledge that we are able to solve it.

QUALITIES OF A GREAT VISION¹¹

We know we create a great vision when it has three qualities:

1. *It comes from the heart.* A vision is in some ways un-reasonable. The heart knows no reason. When our vision asks too much of us, we should begin to trust it.
2. *We, alone, can make this statement.* The statement needs to be recognizable as ours. It needs to be personal, and those who know us should be able to recognize who it came from.
3. *It is radical and compelling.* A vision dramatizes our wishes. This makes it radical and demanding. Radical in the best sense of service rather than rejection. Our willingness to take a unique stand is what empowers us.

*You already possess everything necessary
to become great.
– Crow*

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In the process of reinventing itself, strategic planning has been an observant learner. What we want to do now is share some of the more durable ideas and strategies for thinking and acting strategic that have emerged from the three decades or so of pursuing strategic planning as an essential management and policy mandate. By presenting three different models that have had significant use in recent years in different parts of the world, and a case study involving a large assembly of community leaders who were given the task of creating an economic strategy for a large metropolitan region, we hope to: (1) highlight the enduring values or principles they have in common; (2) suggest there are many effective ways to engage your organization and community in thinking strategically with you; and, (3) encourage you to take the challenge to become a more active visionary strategist.

1. THE LENS MODEL

The use of seminars or workshops has become an important means of carrying out strategic planning efforts for key leaders and executives. The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) uses its Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies (LENS) planning seminar to help organizations world wide formulate strategic plans. Its clientele is a diversity of organizations, including: Qantas Airways; The National Small Industries Corporation, India; Barclay's Bank, Zambia; and, the Mayor's Office of Employment and Training, Chicago. The seminar combines team building and decision making based on the assumption that practical solutions to issues and constraints within an organization are to be found within the organization itself.

ICA focuses on a much shorter implementing time frame than most strategic planning efforts, with key action steps to be carried out within a 90 day period following the seminar. LENS consists of five, 4-hour sessions. Session topics, as ICA labels and describes them, are:

- **Practical vision:** Based on a focus statement (the specific purpose for which the seminar is being held), participants in small and total group work sessions describe a three to five year picture of where the organization or community wants or needs to go.
- **Underlying contradictions:** Through small group and total group exercises, seminar participants identify the major blocks to effective action in achieving the visions outlines in the first session. From individual insights about constraints that will hinder action, the group aggregates and categorizes them and prepares a chart of the organized data. Major blocks to effective action might include such issues as inadequate manpower development policies or unclear consensus on role or purpose of the organization.
- **Strategic proposals:** The third step is to brainstorm individual suggestions for effectively and strategically responding to the contradictions from the previous sessions and organizing these into future actions.
- **Scheduled tactics:** From strategic proposals, the group moves to practical activities by: (a) giving priorities to the proposals from the third session; (b) defining specific actions required to implement the proposal (with emphasis on practicality and catalytic effects rather than sequential steps); and (c) organizing the tactics into "tracks," actions that are similar either in nature or intent.
- **Focused actions:** The final step in the process is to organize teams to take one track from the fourth session and write focused action paragraphs. These are the initiating programs that describe in detail the activities to be pursued in the first three months following the seminar. These paragraph statements include: (a) the name of the program or project; (b) the intent to be addressed; (c) anticipated benefits; (d) detailed components of implementation (who, what, when, where, and how); and (e) what is at stake if the program or project is not done.

2. FUTURE SEARCH: A PROCESS FOR FINDING COMMON GROUND

When Marvin Weisbrod wrote *Productive Workplaces* in 1987, he used the term "future search." So many of his readers took a fascination with his notion, of doing a future search within an organization or community, that he and his colleagues spent the next few years perfecting a model to make the idea work as a tool for *visionary strategists*. What they ultimately came up with is a two day conference staged over three days (from noon on Day 1 to noon, Day 3). A future search conference takes a "whole system" perspective. Like the parable about the blind men and the elephant, our understanding of the organization or community is only as good as our ability to see it from the perspectives of others. When the blind men were asked to describe the elephant, one said the trunk was like a tree. Another thought the tail was a rope. Still another, when

feeling the side of the elephant, described it as a wall. Only when they put their individual perceptions together were they able to "see" more clearly the object they were examining.

To help those involved in a future search process to see the entire "elephant" (in other words achieve a whole systems perspective, as Weisbrod calls it) the conference should include the following participants: *people with information*; *people with authority and resources to act*; and, *people affected by what happens*. (Their criteria for who is invited to be involved, or as many call them in this business, *stakeholders*).

Here, briefly, is an outline of the *Future Search* process. Incidentally, these steps assume the conference planners and key visionary strategists, behind the decision to hold a search conference, have also identified the focus of the conference. In other words, why (the event's central rationale).

DAY 1: (starting at noon and going to six p.m.) Working individually and then in small groups, the participants: (1) review the past and (2) present trends.

Task one gives participants an opportunity to analyze: (1) their own experiences with the organization or community (depending on the focus of the conference); (2) the history of the local government or community over the past thirty years or so (which is the object of the future search); and, (3) milestones in the life of the local government or the community it represents and serves.

The second task is to identify existing trends that will have an impact on the outcome of the topic being addressed through the conference. These trends are written on a large wall of newsprint (2 x 4 meters, for example) and called the group's "mind map." In other words, what are the trends in the larger environment that will have an effect, good or bad, on what participants decide they want to do as a result of the "future search" conference. At the end of this session, each participant is asked to identify seven of the trends he or she believes to be the most important by putting a dot or mark next to each of these trends.

DAY 2: The second day is a full day of small group and plenary sessions with several tasks. The day's activities start with stakeholder groups (for example, elected officials, local government staff, and citizens working in smaller groups) to create their own version of the "mind map" (trends they consider most important to them). This is followed by another exercise. Each stakeholder working group identifies what it is doing currently, in relation to the conference topic, that they are: (1) most proud of; and, (2) sorry about. In other words, the group's perception of the behaviors, good and bad, is made public, and this gets the conference to move beyond "blaming and complaining" and to taking responsibility for things as they are.

Before lunch this second day, participants convene in mixed groups (cross sections of participants) to prepare statements of *ideal futures*. This is followed by the same small groups putting themselves 5, 10 or even 20 years into the future, imagining that their ideal future has come true. The task is completed by groups listing: (a) concrete images and examples of what actually happened (how they got to their future state); and, (b) the barriers they had to overcome along the way. These future scenarios are presented to the entire conference members in any form each stakeholder group decides: drama, skit, TV news show, etc. The other group members record from these events: (a) the themes they hear that are also included in their own presentations; and, (b) projects, events, or innovations they like best from what they hear and see. The creators of this approach to strategic planning (future search) emphasize the importance of making creative presentations at this point that involve many or all members of the group.

After the various scenarios are presented, each group comes up with three lists (on newsprint, of course): (1) "Common Future" (what they all agree they want — usually stated in value statements and other abstract terms); (2) "Potential Projects" (programs, policies, etc.); and (3) "Unresolved Differences" (recognizing conflicts, disagreements that have not been resolved). Regarding differences, the Native Americans have a wonderful saying about this aspect of life in general: *The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears*. The final task of the day is to have two groups come together and merge their lists into one. The groups are asked to put their final list of issues on individual cards or strips of paper so they can be rearranged the next morning into those from all the groups that are related.

DAY 3: The first task on the third and last day of work together is to reorganize all the ideas into similar themes (e.g., shared visions and values; potential actions; and differences to be resolved). Issues from the first two lists that seem to bother members of the group (resist the clustering task) go onto the "unresolved differences" list.

The final task of the conference is to develop action plans. This usually involves two rounds of planning, each followed by group reports and discussions of commitments. The purpose of this last set of exercises is to agree on steps that can be taken as a group to work toward their common future agenda. The worksheets they recommend include short term actions (within the next three months) and long term actions (next three years). Each lists three specifics: What Help Needed; From Whom; and the Due Date.¹²

The strategic planning processes we have just outlined reflect two approaches that are commonly used by a variety of organizations, public and private, in many places around the world. The next model we will outline is equally popular, but it is more content oriented (as contrasted with the "process" orientation of the last two. By this we mean that content focuses more on the what issues while process is more concerned with how to organize activities to achieve the

intended goals. We will be outlining a process later in the workbook that we believe combines the best of the three just in case you decide to practice with your role as visionary strategist.

A shady lane breeds mud.
— Hopi

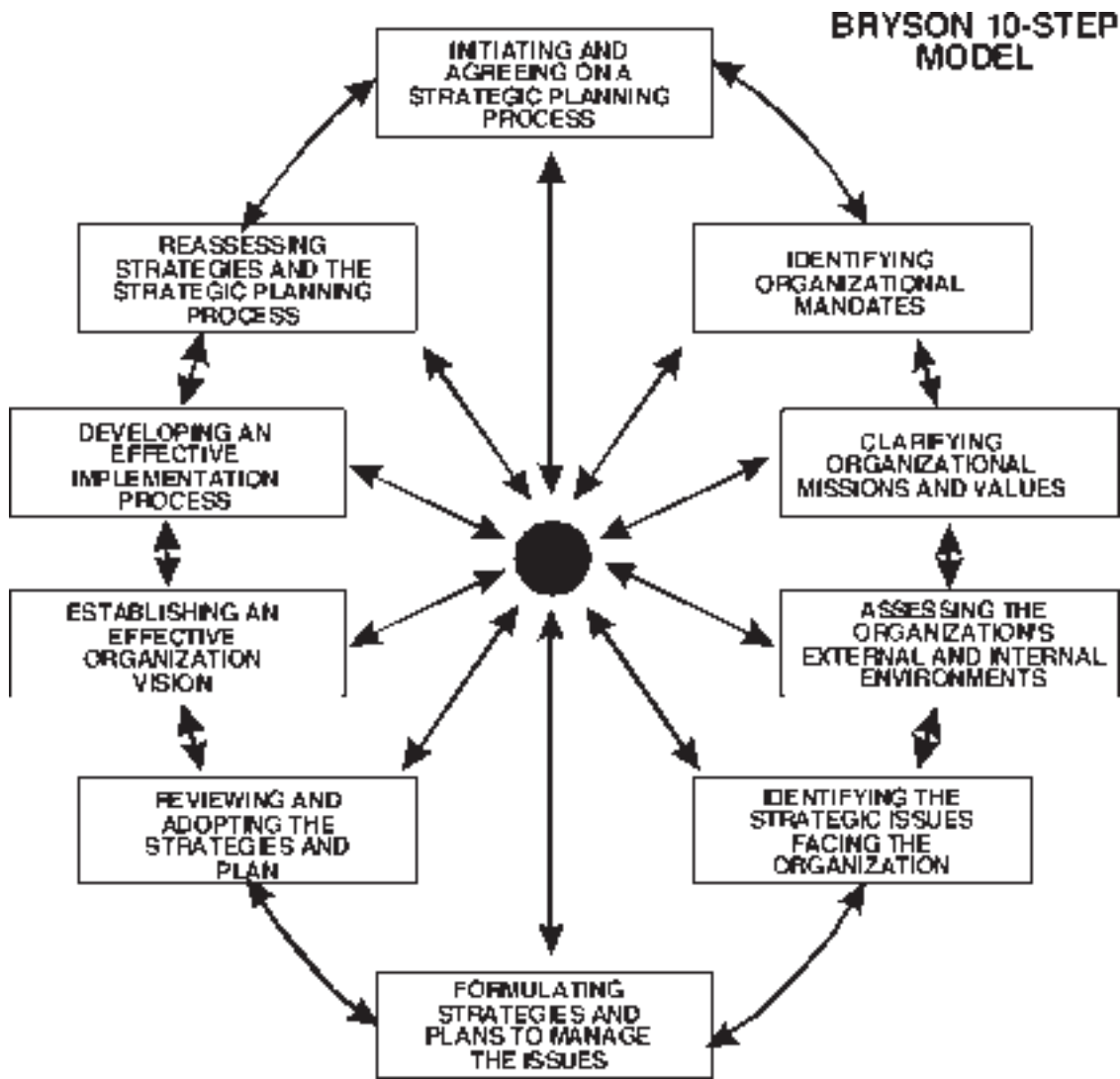
3. THE BRYSON MODEL

John Bryson, author of *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, has probably done more thinking, writing and implementation of the strategic planning process for local governments and community based groups than any other person. Before outlining the Bryson process, here are some cautionary notes he provides about *what strategic planning is not*.

Strategic planning is not a panacea. It is simply a set of concepts, procedures and tools designed to help leaders, managers, and planners think and act strategically. Used in a wise and skillful way by a "coalition of the willing," strategic planning can help an organization focus on producing effective decisions and actions that further the organization's mission, meet its mandates, and satisfy its stakeholders. But strategic planning is not a substitute for strategic thinking and acting. Only caring and committed people can do that. When used thoughtlessly, strategic planning can actually drive out precisely the kind of strategic thought and action it is supposed to promote.¹³

Bryson goes on to say that strategic planning is not a substitute for leadership, nor is it synonymous with creating an organizational strategy. While the process can help organizations develop and implement effective strategies, strategists must remain open to unforeseen circumstances. In other words, this process is a sometime event, designed to engage a group of committed individuals who share a concern about the future of local government and the community. It encourages them to come together with the intent of taking a fresh look at where they have been, where they are and where they want to be in the future. And, it provides them with a structure and process for thinking and acting in an organized, creative and productive way.

Within the context of this discussion about the *visionary strategist*, we want to emphasize that strategic planning is not a substitute for this managerial and leadership role. Strategic planning is merely a tool for helping others in the organization and community come together to share responsibility in this role and to forge a consensus about future states and proposed strategies for moving in that direction. Later, we will suggest when such planning events are needed and how you, as a visionary strategist, can best use this tool to the benefit of your organization and community.



But first, a more detailed look at the Bryson model and contribution on strategic planning. According to Bryson, the only requirements for carrying out the process, "are a dominant coalition that is willing to sponsor and follow the process and a process champion who is willing to push it." (Could that process champion be you, the manager as visionary strategist? Why not?). The ten step process which Bryson provides us is designed to be implemented during a two or three day off-site retreat (a pleasant, non-business like setting that encourages reflection and consensus building). Bryson also suggests a one-day meeting some three or four weeks later to review the progress resulting from the planning process. The follow-up session is designed more to assure commitment than implementation. A motivator needs to keep the key organization responsible for implementing the plan from retreating to a state of business as usual.

BRYSON'S TEN STEPS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

Step 1: Initiating And Agreeing On A Strategic Planning Process. Based on your actions as a visionary strategist, you decide that the time is ripe for a "stand back and take a reflective look at where you are, where you have

been and where you might want to direct the local government from this point on.” Of course, someone else might suggest the organization could benefit from such an exercise in reflective and visionary thinking and planning. In case this happens, by all means support it. As Gary Hamel reminded us earlier, "the bottleneck is at the top of the bottle; and, revolutionaries exist in every organization."¹⁴

Speaking of revolutionaries, you probably want to include them in your *preliminary* stakeholder analysis, which needs to be done at this time. The role and importance of stakeholders was covered in the Manager as Organization Change Agent, so we won't belabor the point here. Suffice to say that stakeholders are all those individuals, groups, and organizations that stake a claim on the organization's attention, resources or output, or are affected by that output, either to their benefit or detriment.

This initial step is essentially planning to undertake the planning process, once there is a felt need to plan; when a few key decision makers decide to undertake the process and agree on the steps that need to be taken to carry it out. Bryson cautions us, at this point in the process, that while the steps are laid out in a linear sequence, the process is iterative and doesn't always begin at the beginning. For example, your organization may be confronted with a new mandate (Step 2), or a pressing strategic issue (Step 5), a failing strategy (Step 6 or 9), or even a need to assess what is going on in the organization that seems to be pulling it away from where it needs to go.

This notion about starting the journey in the middle of the trip can be very confusing, particularly if you are a strong rational thinker. But, the point is important. Organizational and community life is a never ending series of merry-go-round ventures, of planning, doing, assessing, planning, doing, assessing, broken by arbitrary rituals like elections and budget making.

Step 2: Identifying Organizational Mandates. These are the "musts" of the organization and usually associated with formal documents like legislation, charters, ordinances and adopted policies. Local governments, like all organizations, face informal mandates, those associated with unwritten political and social contracts. While it might not be necessary to list these in every case where a strategic planning process is to be undertaken, it is a good idea to at least make a mental note of what these mandates are before delving in.

Step 3: Clarifying Organizational Missions and Values. The organization's mission, when combined with its mandates, provides its justification for existing. For local governments, this means identifiable social or political needs that the organization seeks to fulfill. Viewed in this way, local governments must always see their mission as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. But, the mission statement does more than justify your organization's existence. It can: (1) serve as the rallying point for directing the organization's energy and resources; (2) eliminate unnecessary conflict in the organization by providing direction and minimizing ambiguities; and, (3) chart the future of the organization.

We said earlier that the strategic planning process can begin with any of the ten steps that Bryson outlines. In fact, many efforts to undertake the strategic planning process begin with the identification of the organization's mission. Step 3 also includes the first step in stakeholder analysis. Note: we provided you with a definition of the stakeholder in the description of Future Search (and also in Workbook #3, *The Manager as Organization Change Agent*).

To enrich your understanding of this role (or to add to your confusion), Bryson describes stakeholders as: *any person, group or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output or is affected by that output*. As a visionary strategist, who will be recommending that the local government undertake a strategic planning process, your first iteration of the "stakeholder analysis" task will be to determine who must be on the team responsible for recommending and planning the process to important other stakeholders.

Step 4: Assessing the Organization's External and Internal Environments.

This is what many of you will recognize as the tool called *SWOT Analysis*. SWOT stands for *strengths and weaknesses* as they relate to the internal environment (within the organization); and, *opportunity and threats* relate to those aspects of the external environment not directly under the organization's control. Generally, but not always, opportunities and threats are more about the future than the present, while strengths and weaknesses are more about the present than the future.

There are times when certain analytical tasks are best carried out prior to the strategic planning sessions that involve an expanded set of stakeholders. In a major economic development working conference, involving 200 key public, private and NGO officials, the conference planners prepared a detailed research report on key economic indicators and trends. This report was presented to all participants at the beginning of the conference to validate the importance of their efforts and to give them a common understanding of the magnitude of the economic challenge. (See the enclosed case study for more information on this strategic planning example.)

Step 5: Identifying the Strategic Issues Facing the Organization. The first four steps in the process should lead to the fifth, the identification of strategic issues. These are: (1) fundamental policy and management issues that affect the organization's mandates, mission and values; (2) a need to rethink program and service levels and priorities; (3) who the clients are or should be; (4) major financial implications of present and future mandates and policies; or, (5) a combination of these.

Bryson suggests the strategic issues, when put into writing, should include three elements:

- a clear, short description of the issue, preferably as a question that the organization can do something positive to answer;

- a list of factors that make the issue a fundamental challenge to the organization (could be mission, mandates, values and key results from the SWOT analysis); and,
- a statement of consequences to be expected if the issue is not addressed.

Step 6: Formulating Strategies and Plans to Manage the Issues. A strategy, according to Bryson, is a *pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, and resource allocations that define what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it*. The key term in this definition is *pattern*. And, it reinforces what we have been saying about the role of the *visionary strategist*. Managers are at their best when they can both think in tactical terms (how to implement specific task oriented endeavors) *and* engage in strategic visions, a process that requires one to see the mosaic of potential contributors to a complex and intertwined pattern of issues and concerns. One way to approach this action planning process is through a *cause and effect, means to ends* relationship. (The action planning process in Workbook 3 of this series, *The Manager as Organization Change Agent*, outlines the cause effect process in more detail.)

Step 7: Reviewing and Adopting the Strategies and Plan. This assumes the need to have the strategy, that has been formulated through some planning process, adopted officially by the necessary policy makers (local government elected official body, or bodies). This could be a part of Step 6 if the elected officials are a part of the planning process which we believe is essential when engaging in long-term strategic planning at the local level. In planning that cuts across political boundaries (involving more than one local government), there may be need to have simultaneous policies adopted by the collaborating organizations.

For example, a strategic planning process to solve a long standing solid waste management problem in a region may require a number of local governments to adopt interlocal agreements and uniform policies for pricing and enforcement.

Step 8: Establishing an Effective Organization Vision. This is a description of the organization's "vision of success," or what the organization would look like once it successfully implements its strategies and has achieved the intended results. We would argue that this step probably needs to come earlier in the process, having the vision drive the implementation strategy. Otherwise, we fear it will be business as usual with incremental steps taken toward a future that is largely defined by conventional means of forecasting. Bryson recognizes this dilemma and defends his position by saying, "most organizations typically will not be able to develop a detailed vision of success until they have gone through several iterations of strategic planning." The vision is often caught in the tension between what the organization and its members want and what they can realistically have.

Step 9: Developing an Effective Implementation Process. This is the step in the process that requires those who will be responsible for the plan's implementation to come up with a rigorous action plan. Ultimately, the action

plan must include: (1) clearly defined roles and responsibilities (who will do what with whom); (2) specific objectives and expected outcomes (results); (3) tasks to be carried out; (4) schedules, resource commitments and allocations, constant monitoring, review and midcourse corrections, and (5) accountability procedures. Again, we urge you to review the materials on staff development (Workbook 5 in this series) and action planning and implementation (Workbook 3).

Step 10: Reassessing Strategies and the Strategic Planning Process.

Since we are talking about a process that is more or less cyclical in nature, it is important to review what has been done from time to time and to determine whether a new round of strategic planning should be undertaken. Strategic planning, as outlined, includes much of what managers do instinctively (well, what effective managers do!). It also includes the process effective managers set in motion from time to time, involving a wider set of stakeholders, when it is obvious that the "big picture" needs adjusting or completely overhauled.

Having just outlined Bryson's ten steps, we want to caution you about slavishly implementing them in 1,2 3,4 ... step fashion. The process is not linear; it's cyclical. Like getting on to a merry-go-round (carousel), you can step into the action at any place. And, you should start the process from the point where you are and not where you want to be. Or equally important, not where you have been. And once on this managerial merry-go-round, you can move back and forth without stopping the action. To use a different metaphor, weaver Annie Albers says, "If you play with the fibers, they suggest possibilities." (Incidentally, metaphors are good tactics to help you and your team of strategic visionaries think outside the box).

REFLECTION

To put Annie Albers' notion about "playing with the fibers" to work, we suggest a bit of active reflection time. Jot down Bryson's ten steps on different pieces of paper (index cards work best because they are easy to move around). But, don't number the cards or steps. Sitting at a desk or table, think about how you might go about designing a strategic planning process for your organization, or local government. Then, take the ten steps as stated on the cards and arrange the cards in the order you think makes most sense as a strategy for implementing a strategic planning process, given the current situation and environment. After "playing with the cards," jot down, in the following space, the sequence of events you think makes most sense if you were to initiate a strategic planning process in your organization or community.

[illegible]

WHY PLAN?

We have looked at many different interpretations of strategic planning, and some ways of doing it. Nevertheless, you may be still asking the question, "Why plan?" The question is not naive given the history of planning in many countries around the world.

One study of national planning and budgeting efforts in a dozen countries (outside of Europe) concluded that the efforts at comprehensive planning had done more harm than good. The former communist block countries were noted

for their ability to carry out comprehensive, centralized, multi-year planning efforts. And yet, these plans were not able to thwart high levels of economic and political stagnation. It is possible these notorious five-year plans even contributed to the demise of their sponsors.

So, why plan? If we're talking about centralized, planner dominated, rationale-analytical projections of current needs and public assets into an uncertain future, then perhaps there is little reason to do so. If, by contrast, we see strategic planning as a management process that determines allocation priorities and designs realistic implementation strategies (but keeps the managers options open), then planning makes sense and the time invested in doing it will be well spent.

The key to effective strategic planning is largely in the *process* and not the *product* — or the *plan*. For the process to be effective, it needs to be:

- **participative** (being done by decision makers and problem solvers, not for or to them);
- **interactive** (involving a confrontation of what is and what can be);
- **integrative** (fusing bottom up with top down thinking about what should be done, how it should be done and who should do it: and,
- **iterative** (recognizing that purposeful systems and their environments are continuously changing and no plan retains its value over time).

As John Friedman reminds us, "planning is not merely concerned with the efficient instrumentation of objectives, it is also a process by which a society may discover its future."¹⁵

WHEN AND WHY TO PLAN

Being a visionary strategist, as an integral part of your managerial mindset and perspective, is also a function of how you operate as a manager. In other words, the role is something that permeates your *thoughts and actions* as "the complete manager." If you like to fish, you may have read Izaak Walton's book, *The Complete Angler*, published nearly 350 years ago. We have chosen to create the simile of the complete manager because Walton, as the complete fisherman, was not only knowledgeable and skilled in his avocation but totally in tune with his "operating" environment and the ways and wiles of the fish he pursued so successfully. So it is with managers in their role as the visionary strategist.

However, the role and the process are different when it comes to creating and implementing a strategic plan. The role and responsibilities of being a visionary strategist is continuous, woven into the fabric of your managerial and leadership thinking and doing. On the other hand, the strategic planning process is a sometime event, used strategically and timely to overcome logjams in our thinking or progress, or to set the stage for some quantum leap that will take the organization or community from where it is, to where it wants to be.

Let's look at some situations when strategic planning might be useful and *timely*.

- **When** the organization, or community, is in crisis. (Which was the case in the following case study.)
- **When** the leadership wants to capitalize on momentum created by some special event. For example, The Foundation for Training in Self Government conducted a successful strategic planning process after key stakeholders returned from a successful study tour where they gained many new ideas and insights on how to serve local governments more effectively.
- **When** there is a major shift or change in the way the organization conducts business (or is expected to conduct business). For example, a change in the ownership and operation of public utilities, such as water and waste water management might precipitate the need for strategic planning by critical stakeholders.
- **When** there are major shifts in the environment in which local governments operate (e.g., the creation of regional elected bodies or the loss of a major employer in the area).
- **When** there are changes in either elected or appointed leadership within the organization.
- **When** new technology is introduced into the organization (e.g., the national association of municipalities installs a web site and interactive information system for its members and needs to develop a strategic plan for optimizing its utility.)
- **When** it is essential to enlarge the "ownership" of a problem, like air pollution in the community, and to tap resources beyond the boundaries of the municipal organization for resolving the problem.
- **When** the organization wants to alter its managerial style to include more interdepartmental teamwork and shared decision making authority within the organization.
- **When** the local parliament adopts changes in policies that will require long-term operational strategies to implement the policy changes.

Strategic planning can become jaded by overuse, losing its potential to generate fresh and creative ideas. While the examples of when to use the strategic planning process suggests it is episodic in nature, it can also be used as a special time in the life of an organization. It can be an opportunity to stop for a day or so, take stock of what's happening and where the organization is heading, and to do minor repairs, or even major overhauls to the operational machinery of local governance, if necessary. For example, the local parliament and senior appointed staff might want to make this a part of the annual budget ritual.

An essential part of the role of the *visionary strategist* is to be constructively critical of the ideas and assumptions that define the boxes we have learned to live so comfortably within. Or, that keeps us from breaking out of our own mind made prisons. Karl Weick tells the story of a group of hikers lost in a severe snowstorm in the Swiss Alps. They were stranded and on the verge of

giving up hope when one of them found a map in his packet. Mobilized by new possibilities, they mustered their energy and found their way back to civilization. After they had returned home safely, they discovered that the map they had used to escape their potential tragedy was of the Pyrenees, not the Alps!

As Wayne Gretzky, one of the world's premier hockey players, said, when asked about the secret of his success, *"I skate to where I think the puck will be."*



CASE STUDY — DEVELOPING ECONOMIC STRATEGIES THROUGH COMMUNITY-WIDE ENGAGEMENT

The authors have had many experiences in helping local government organizations and communities carry out strategic planning efforts. One of the more interesting experiences involved a Regional Planning Commission in a medium sized, mid-west city in the United States. The Commission asked one of the authors to help organize and conduct a strategic planning conference on economic development for the metropolitan area. The overall mission of the conference was "to provide a forum within which public and private leaders in the Miami Valley could reach consensus on a) the major economic development challenges and opportunities to be addressed within the next five years; and b) a strategy for further consideration and action." It was two days in length and involved just over 200 leaders representing public organizations, private corporations, neighborhood groups, elected officials, non-profit agencies, the media, professional and business organizations, and agricultural associations.

The conference was initiated by a formal presentation and open discussion about the economic conditions of the metropolitan area. The past decade was reviewed in terms of: a) shifts in employment (the region had lost several thousand jobs in primary manufacturing over a 7-8 year period); b) retail and service trends; and, c) the role of support institutions (e.g., government, education, social service) during that period. The presentation, which was based on a research document, also framed the regional economy within the context of national and international economic trends and made certain projections about the near future.

Given this background information and data, each individual participant was asked to identify the five most important economic development challenges or opportunities facing the region at that time.

The terms *challenge* and *opportunity* were defined in the following manner:

- A *challenge* is an economic circumstance which is currently detrimental to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be eliminated or diminished (an economic liability).

- An *opportunity* is an economic circumstance with is currently advantageous to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be exploited (an economic asset).

Twenty small work groups of about ten members each were formed with the task of discussing their individual lists for clarification and understanding and reaching a group consensus on the five most important economic development challenges and opportunities for the region. Each subgroup presented their list to a plenary session, which involved all 200 participants.

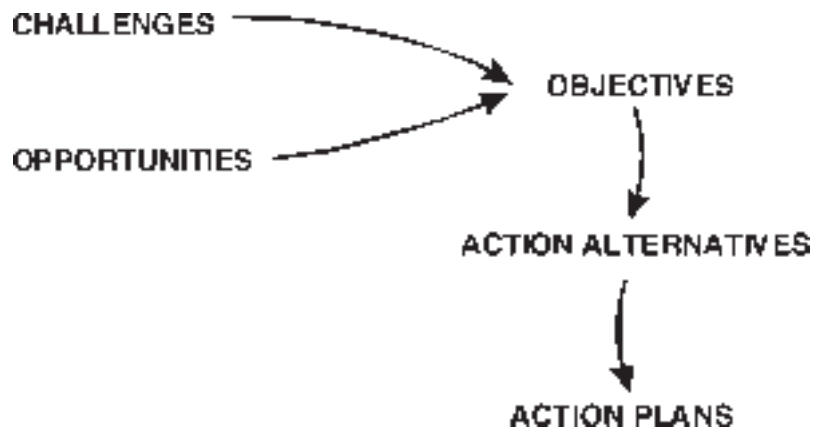
While there was a potential of 100 different issues, many were duplications, and the final list involved 31 different statements. These were organized by the workshop staff into a survey questionnaire (during the late afternoon tea break!) and each participant was asked (following the tea break and prior to adjourning for the day) to once again vote for what he or she considered the five most important from the combined list of 31. Participants were also told to rank order the statements from one to five: one being most important; two, next important, etc. The staff tabulated the results that evening by cumulative weight (e.g., a number one vote was given a weight of five) and by the number of individuals voting for any single statement of challenge or opportunity. From the voting results, eight issues were clearly top priority taking into account both methods of calculation.

On the following day, the results of the voting and tabulation were announced to the group and eight work groups were formed to address each of the top priority issues identified in the previous day's sessions. Each participant was given an opportunity to self-select the topic he or she wanted to help address based on interest, experience and potential contribution to its resolution. As it turned out, we had one very large group, several medium sized groups and one with only "a handful" of participants. While this concerned the consultant (who tends to think groups of more than 10 participants are a bit unwieldy and unproductive), each group performed to his expectations and satisfaction and carried out the following tasks:

- identified the desired outcome of the challenge or opportunity their group was considering (the goal or objective to be achieved);
- identified alternative courses of action that could be taken to achieve the desired outcome;
- developed an action plan for achieving their desired outcome or goal.

Each work group reported its recommendations to the total membership of the conference toward the end of the second and final day. At that time, there were discussions about each of the recommendations and proposed action plans. Decisions were made to assign responsibilities to specific officers and organizations to begin implementing the recommendations.

The final proceedings of the conference were published and made available to the participants and a wide range of citizens and organizations in the region. The strategic economic development plan, forged in those two hectic days of discussion, became both policy and a work plan for the Regional Planning Commission. In a return visit to the region nearly a year later, the consultant learned that many of the recommendations had already been implemented while others were still in progress.



REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Conferences, of this kind, do not happen serendipitously. They take careful planning, and rigorous managing once they are underway. This conference was particularly difficult because it involved so many people with varied backgrounds, experience and expectations. Some of the things that were done in preparation for the conference (which are applicable to most planning conferences) were:

- *To be clear about roles and responsibilities* (who will do what when).
- *To enlist help and to train participants in the process.* (In this case, it meant identifying and training 20 small work group facilitators who would be responsible for helping each group accomplish the tasks assigned them). The training only took two or three hours on the afternoon before the conference opened because most of the facilitators already had experience in leading small task group discussions.
- *To be clear about the group tasks and to be certain they would be conveyed to each group in a consistent, clear and unambiguous fashion.* If the group tasks are unclear or ambiguous, the products of group efforts will probably be unclear and ambiguous. If the group facilitators each describe the task differently, the products become impossible to assemble into a coherent plan.
- *To be willing to make changes, as needed, as the conference progressed.* While it is important to plan in a rigorous manner, it is just as important, at times, to change those plans as they are being carried out. There is

nothing like the implementation of a well laid plan to expose its frailties. Planning workshops and conferences of the kind just described, have a way of creating a life of their own. The effective facilitator must not only be aware of what is happening but to take advantage of it. For example, it was assumed that groups for the final day should be fairly uniform in size to work effectively. As it turned out, the participants wanted no part of being assigned to a group arbitrarily. They preferred to self select around their individual interests. To have insisted on uniform groups would have demotivated many individuals who had a valuable contribution to make to the discussion and final recommendations. Given this, the consultant made changes in his own thinking about what was important and how the conference should be managed.

Conferences and workshops are excellent vehicles for helping organizations and communities carry out a strategic planning process. They can become the center piece of the planning process, as was the case with the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission efforts, or they can be one of a number of events organized to facilitate the overall strategic planning process.

SPECIAL RESOURCE

Guide to Strategic Planning for the Manager as Facilitator

by David W. Tees

*...the primary threats to our survival,
both of our organizations and our societies,
come not from sudden events
but from slow, gradual processes.
– Peter Senge*

INTRODUCTION

Thinking strategically and positioning the local government organization to respond effectively to change is essential management work. This workbook on *The Manager as Visionary Strategist* has been written in recognition of this fact. But there is more to be said. While most managers are satisfied with a conceptual understanding of strategic planning, other managers want to know more about the process and, more specifically, the facilitator's role. If you are one of these managers, we invite you to don your facilitator's hat and join me on this brief but informative journey.

Before moving on, let's take a minute to look at how you as a local government manager might make use of this material.

- The first way it can be used is as a guide for the manager who wants to be a facilitator for another local government or community group that has decided to undertake a strategic planning process. You notice I said another local government or community group. If you are like most managers, one of the most important qualities you look for in an outside consultant is objectivity. You want assurance that the consultant will not take sides; will not be influenced by past events or relationships when working with issues in your organization. Likewise, your own objectivity as a consultant-facilitator can be assured only when you are working with an organization or community group other your own.
- The second way this material can be used is by the manager who may not be interested in being a facilitator but simply wants to see the strategic planning process from the consultant's point of view. Managers with this perspective can be more effective when contracting with outside consultants who are proposing to conduct a strategic planning process for their organizations or community groups.

You will find two kinds of information in the following pages. First is my effort to clarify the facilitator's role by describing one of my own experiences as a strategic planning consultant with a strong group of community leaders that included as active participants both the mayor and city manager. This material is written as a case study. Second, and synchronized with the case study, is my commentary

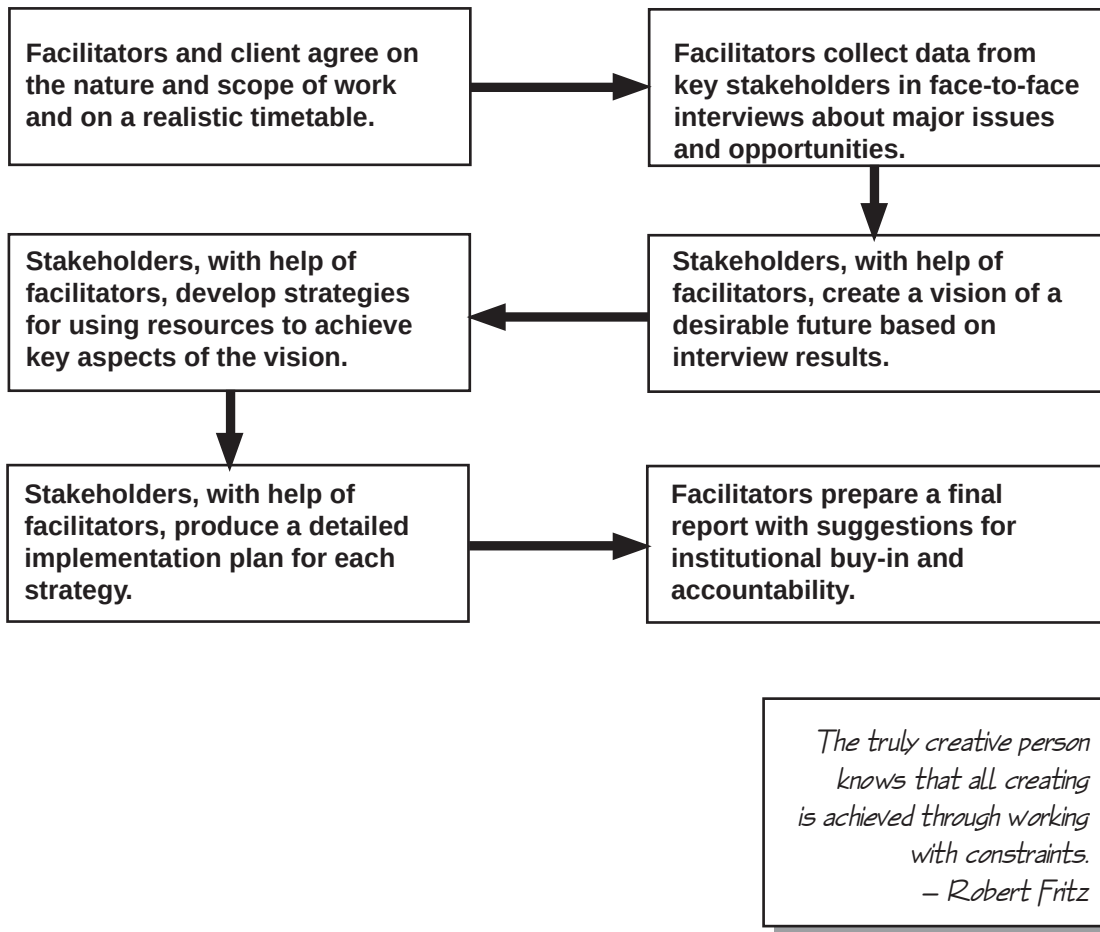
about the strategic planning process as I have used it for several years in both economic development and community development planning.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We are almost certain to agree that there is no better way to master something than to become actively involved in doing it under the guidance of someone more experienced. If we do agree on that, then we would probably agree as well that the best way to get started as a strategic planning facilitator is to assist someone who has been doing strategic planning successfully for awhile. In other words, there is great value in having the opportunity to design and facilitate a strategic planning process under the watchful eye of someone who can coach you and give you constructive feedback on your performance.

My introduction to the “art” of strategic planning and the facilitator’s role began that way. A colleague with considerable experience in strategic planning became my mentor and for several years collaborated with me on numerous consulting assignments. What I knew about strategic planning before entering this collaboration was from reading the ideas of leading authors in the field, like John Bryson, and from participation in strategic planning workshops. At an early stage, I was interested to learn how the experience of my colleague matched the theoretical concepts to which I had been exposed. From our discussions about different approaches to strategic planning and more reading, the design of a strategic planning process that I could recommend to my local government clients - see *Figure 1* - began to take shape in my mind.

Figure 1. Design for a Strategic Planning Process



1. INITIATION

Case Study

One morning, I received a telephone call from the city manager of a nearby town of about 12,000 population. He said that he and a dozen other community leaders had been called together as a task force by the mayor to study and develop a plan for broadening the community's revenue base and combating the community's rising unemployment problems. The manager admitted that he was disappointed in the group's progress so far. "After six months, we haven't accomplished one bloody thing," he said. "We need a process to get us started and move us in the direction we want to go. Is that something you can help us with?"

After consulting with my colleague, I sent the city manager a proposal for a strategic planning process based on the design shown in Figure 1. The proposal

consisted of a couple of pages that described a process for data collection, visioning, strategy development and action planning. In our view, this could be done in four days. The proposal also contained our requirements for financial compensation. In this case, we asked to be reimbursed for our expenses to prepare and facilitate meetings of the task force and to be paid for our professional services at a mutually acceptable daily rate. The schedule included two days for each of us for final report preparation.

The first day, we felt, would be used to get acquainted with task force members, perhaps tour the community, and review the proposed work plan and timetable with task force members. This visit would be an opportunity for the task force and for us to decide if we wanted to move ahead with a strategic planning relationship. Since my colleague and I were both to be involved, we felt we could complete face-to-face interviews with all twelve members of the task force in one day. Our first day with the task force as a whole would be to give feedback from the interviews and help task force members create a group vision of their community as economically sound and healthy. The last day with the task force would be to help with the development of strategies for positioning the community to attain its vision in three to five years and to begin work on detailed action plans and timetables for implementing each of the highest priority strategies.

Since task force members could not afford to be away from their responsibilities for more than one day at a time, the entire process was to be spread out over a 30-day period.

A few days after receiving the proposal, the city manager called me with an invitation to attend a task force meeting the following week to review our proposal.

Commentary

When a major problem or opportunity confronts an organization or a community and when some kind of long-range planning efforts seems an appropriate response, a first step is to assemble a group of key individuals (stakeholders) with an interest in doing something about it. The purpose of the meeting is to explore expectations and to answer several questions before moving ahead. Sometimes these questions are answered before a facilitator is invited. Otherwise, the facilitator can help the group find the answers. Among the questions to be answered are:

- Why are we doing this?
- What will success look like?
- Will the proposed process get us there?
- How much time are we willing to commit?
- Who else should be included?
- When is the best time to meet?

The choice of participants is influenced by several factors. It is important to include anyone who has a strong personal or organizational interest in the problem or opportunity. This includes anyone who ultimately will be accountable for what is or is not done. Also, it is prudent to include in the process those persons in the community who have the power to get things done and anyone who might be a significant adversary if left out.

*We are confronted
with insurmountable opportunities.
— Pogo*

2. INTERVIEWS

Case Study

Within a few days after our initial meeting with the task force, I received a call from the city manager accepting our proposal. A date was set for our next visit, to interview the 12 task force members. Task force members had already discussed this and had agreed on a date that would give us access to the largest number of individuals possible. It was necessary for us to begin the interviews at noon on a Thursday, conduct two interviews during the evening hours that day and complete the rest on Friday morning. One task force member was out of town during this time and was interviewed by telephone a few days later to avoid another trip. Interview scheduling was handled by a member of the city manager's staff who was able to arrange the use of a conference room at the municipal building for the conduct of interviews.

We were careful in the task force interviews to use the same set of questions and to ask them in the same order each time. We wanted to know what the task force members saw as the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for their community in building a strong and healthy economy. The questions we selected for the interviews were worded for easy understanding and to produce candid and thoughtful responses. The questions selected and the order in which they were asked are as follows:

- 1. What do you see as some of the most important strong points of the local economy in - name of city - ?*
- 2. What weaknesses in the local economy of - name of city - do you feel should be given highest priority attention by community leaders?*
- 3. What events or trends have you observed in the region, nation or world that have the potential to significantly strengthen the local economy?*
- 4. What do you see as factors that might prevent the community from taking advantage of opportunities like these?*

5. *Is there anything else about the local economy and conditions and events in your community that we have not covered that I should know about?*

With the interviews completed, my colleague and I began the somewhat tedious process of consolidating the ideas from the 12 interviews, one question at a time. The resulting ideas were then reduced to summary statements, at least 10 statements for each interview question. These were typed in the largest available typeface and printed, each on a separate sheet of paper. We took the typed sheets to a local printing company to be enlarged sufficiently so each could be read with ease by a task force member seated at the far end of a six meter conference table. The final products, we call them “zoomers,” were roughly 62 centimeters in length and 46 centimeters in width (an example of a zoomer that appeared in the category of “opportunities” is shown below).

Opportunities

1. Information technology gives us ready access to a worldwide marketplace.

Commentary

Face-to-face interviews are strongly encouraged as a primary means for obtaining the data needed for later steps in the strategic planning process. Interviews take from 40 to 60 minutes depending on the complexity of the issues. If those to be interviewed are available at the same general location, allow about one hour for each interview including preparation time and some relaxation. They are best done from seven to ten days before the session so that the information gathered is still “fresh” and the meetings can be used to create anticipation. If the size of the group to be interviewed exceeds 30 to 40, either more interviewers must be recruited or random sampling can be done to reduce the magnitude of the interview task.

There are many reasons other than the assembly of information for the use of face-to-face interviewing. A meaningful conversation with participants ahead of time is a good way for the facilitator to become quickly sensitized to the issues and the intensity of feeling surrounding them. Face-to-face conversations help to break the ice. They begin the process of building relationships before the program begins. They create anticipation for the program and its purpose. And interviews get much of the time consuming work of data gathering out of the way before the program begins.

Strategic planning depends on accurate and reliable information on what people know and think. Elected officials and top managers are often guarded in revealing their opinions about the issues; that is, they are prone to say the

politically correct thing, often side stepping the real issues. When the facilitator is seen as genuinely interested and demonstrates good listening techniques, face-to-face interviewing can help lower these barriers to communication. Telephone interviews are less effective than face-to-face interviews in assuring reliable data and in building credibility for the facilitator. However, they may be the only feasible way to interview everyone, particularly when working at long distances and with conflicting work schedules. Telephone interviews normally take 20 minutes and should be done seven to ten days prior to the session.

We think of each interview as an environmental scan. The questioning starts with something like, "What's going well for...?" The initial focus on strengths is meant to establish a positive mood. We have found that discussing strengths tends to disarm the person being interviewed since most interviews concern something that has gone wrong. The next question shifts the focus to prevailing weaknesses, "What is not going well for...?" This gives the person being interviewed a chance to bring out any factors or behaviors inside the organization or the community that might prevent making necessary improvements.

The third question usually is to search for opportunities with a question like, "What are some important opportunities for...?" The intent is to sharpen the focus on those things that are the most important or most needed to be preserved or improved upon. In like manner, look for the handicaps or obstacles to change or improvement with a question like, What might prevent you from seizing these opportunities? Another question is, "What one thing would you most like to change?" This is meant to cause the person being interviewed to reflect deeply and offer further insights into important directions for change.

The person being interviewed is signaled that the interview is about to end with a final question such as, "What have I missed that I should know about?" In all cases, of course, interviewees are assured personal anonymity in interview summaries and reports.

When all of the interviews have been completed, it is necessary to review the results and to organize them into a form suitable for presentation to strategic planning participants. This can be done by having a clerk consolidate the answers to each of the interview questions in a single, typed document. The facilitators review the document to identify common themes or patterns in responses to the questions. These response patterns are then summarized in short statements. It is important in composing the statements to preserve the expressions and language of the interviewees as much as possible.

The statements then are printed on individual sheets of paper in the largest possible font size. These can be further increased in size using a commercial photocopy process and transferred to strips of poster board (up to 65 by 50 cm). The resulting "zoomers," as they are often called, should be large enough to be easily read from any point in the training room where participants will be seated. The use of visual aids, like zoomers, will help reduce the common tendency of training participants to wander mentally by engaging their eyes as well as the ears in what is taking place.

Individuals gain 75% of what they know visually, 13% through hearing and 12% through a combination of touch, smell, taste.
– David Peoples

3. DATA FEEDBACK

Case Study

We arrived an hour early for the opening session of the strategic planning session. When the task force members began to arrive, we already had grouped the roughly 50 zoomers by question and taped all of them to the walls of the conference room using masking tape. Also set up and ready for use were two easels with flip charts and felt-tipped markers in various colors.

The agenda for the first day was sent as a draft by e-mail for review by the city manager and a local businessman who was chairing the task force. After clearing up a few questions, the agenda, in its final form, had two objectives:

- 1. to let task force members experience their collective perceptions and ideas about the local economy from interview results; and,*
- 2. to create a shared vision of economic vitality for the community that could serve as the basis for subsequent planning.*

Most of the morning was spent in a review of interview results as my colleague and I took turns reading and commenting on each category of zoomers and asking for clarifying comments from the group.

Commentary

The agenda for the strategic planning session is coordinated in advance to assure it is consistent with client's needs. It is best to wait until interview results are available to develop a final agenda. Even then, it is a good idea to stay flexible and ready to adjust the agenda as the session moves forward. As mentioned earlier, the space for a strategic planning session should be large enough to seat all anticipated participants comfortably with an unobstructed view of areas where presentations will be made or information is on display. Plenty of wall space should be available for taping up interview results or information generated during the session. Additional rooms with tables, chairs and pads/easels/tape/markers should be available to small groups (usually from five to nine participants) for "breakout" sessions.

The way introductions are handled depends on the size of the group and how well participants already know each other. In addition to the usual name and job title, a useful question to ask is: What's going to prevent you from participating fully in what is happening here today? This question can be asked rhetorically and used to show that 80% or more of a participant's time is spent thinking about things unrelated to the group's discussion. The point can be made that filling the walls with notes on the meeting's comments to increase the attention span reduce the tendency of participants to wander off mentally as mentioned earlier. Besides, many of the best ideas come "off the wall" as participants concentrate longer and more deeply on what they see written down in large print right in front of them.

The display of interview data as zoomers is an essential first step for the session for several reasons. First, it puts all of the participants "on the same page," disclosing the pattern of thinking within the group. Secondly, people often will say to a stranger what they will not say to one another. Recording key ideas on zoomers and taping them to the wall of the training room gets the data out and keeps it in front of participants as they deliberate. This takes the pressure off participants to reveal with their true feelings in front of their peers. Thirdly, people, when they see their ideas in writing, "let go of them" and begin to think more deeply and interact more readily with one another.

Zoomers can be displayed by categories with the label identifying the category at the top. These labels might correspond, for example, to the questions that are used in the interview. However, other categories may be preferable in some instances. It may be useful, as well, to show how many people contributed to each idea.

When presenting the ideas on zoomers, every item is read out loud to reinforce it. After every item has been read, a clarifying question can be asked, "Have we got it right?" This is done at the conclusion of each question or subject category. If there is more than one facilitator, they may take turns reading the zoomer categories to give participants a bit of variety and the facilitators an opportunity to share exposure.

*There is no more powerful engine driving
an organization toward excellence and
long-range success than an attractive,
worthwhile, and achievable vision of the
future, widely shared.*
— Burt Nanus

4. VISIONING

Case study

In the afternoon, the groups attention shifted to the creation of a shared vision. My colleague had cautioned me before the session that some groups are skeptical about spending time on visioning. Anticipating this, we spent a few minutes explaining the power of a vision to align people with a common purpose and give direction to their joint efforts. We wanted task force members to understand that visions can help people separate what is truly important from what is just interesting; help them focus their attention and their resources on the things that really matter.

Experiencing no overt resistance and as a prelude to moving ahead with visioning, we put this simple question to the group:

*Imagine it is five years from today and
nothing has been done to strengthen local businesses or to create
an environment attractive to new businesses.
What do you see when you look at
your community?*

My colleague likes to describe this reality check as the organization operating on “autopilot” or “cruise control.” Both terms suggest a status quo approach to community development. The response of the group to the question was predictably gloomy, the image of a town in decline with little to look forward to or hope for. One member of the task force put eloquently into words what everyone was thinking: “We can’t stand still as a community; either we move forward with vision and courage or we move backward into mediocrity. The choice is ours.”

We found this exercise immensely useful as stage setting for the next step with the task force, helping articulate a more hopeful future - creating a “vision.”

For this effort, which my colleague described as a bright future created through “hard work, a little luck and no miracles,” the task force was divided in half (six members each) with me as facilitator for one of the groups and my colleague for the other. Each group, in about 45 minutes, had created several dozen descriptions of highly desirable conditions related to the local economy that might be brought into existence under the criteria set down by my colleague. Before adjourning, two members of the task force agreed to consolidate the results of the visioning exercise into a vision statement and to circulate it for comment before the next meeting.

Our Vision

We are known as the most desirable community for business relocation or expansion in the region with a highly skilled labor force, easy access to a worldwide marketplace, a modern technological infrastructure, excellent systems and facilities for lifelong learning and a healthy, safe and affordable family environment.

Commentary

The term “vision,” as used in the literature on strategic planning, is a description of a future time when the best that can be imagined in the present has become a reality for an organization or a whole community.

There are varying opinions on when to use visioning or even whether to use it. A well-articulated vision, developed early in the planning process, provides a foundation for making program choices. In addition it can be a powerful way to mobilize resources and promote making commitments to sustained action. Unfortunately, there is sometimes resistance to visioning as a waste of time. When this is the case, an alternative is to begin with a discrete problem statement or the development of the elements needed for a successful program or problem solution. In an ideal circumstance, however, visioning is done as described below.

If the group is small enough (less than 30 people), do the visioning exercise in a single group. If the group is larger than that, break it into small groups of no more than ten each. When creating small groups, it may be desirable to avoid composing groups of people who work side by side or think alike. To avoid this “me to” problem and to populate groups of people with differing viewpoints, have people “count off” and assign them to groups by number.

Begin with what is sometimes called an “auto pilot” or “cruise control” reality check. This is done by asking people to answer this question: “What will things be like in five years (maybe three - best not to do ten) if this session produces nothing worthwhile and you make no major changes in how you are doing things now?” After 20-30 minutes, the groups return to a plenary session to report their results. The depressing results of this exercise act as a stimulus for the exercise in visioning that is to follow.

Next, participants break into the same small groups to develop a realistic, achievable five-year vision. Participants are sometimes told to assume a “little luck, hard work, no miracles” approach when developing their vision statements. This approach is to clarify for participants the value added as a result of their

use of strategic planning. After about 30 to 45 minutes, groups reconvene and report their vision statements to one another using flip charts and allowing for questions. This will take at least 45 minutes and could take considerably longer depending on the number of groups.

The visions derived from this stage do need to be merged into a single statement that all participants can accept and can feel a sense of ownership and commitment. Merging vision statements can be complex and time consuming. One way to do it is to ask each group to exchange about one third of its membership with another groups and then to develop a statement that answers these three questions:

- What do all of the visions have in common?
- In light of the various visions, what do you think is possible to agree upon?
- What one thing, relative to your own vision, do you care most about?

Each group returns after about 30 minutes to present (on flip chart) the statement prepared as the group's response to the three questions. With the help of the facilitators, duplications are eliminated and, one at a time, each of the statements is reviewed with each of the other groups. This is done by asking: "Is this statement acceptable to your group?" After about 20 to 30 minutes, a "single text" of approved statements is created. Normally, the single text can be created with little disagreement. However, if there is a need to resolve differences, the whole group can be asked for suggestions. This usually results in quick resolution.

*If you always do what you always did,
you always get what you always got.*
— Anonymous

5. STRATEGIES

Case Study

A week later, we joined the task force for a second day-long strategic planning session. Our objective this time was to help task force members construct a set of strategies for economic development and a plan of action for putting the strategies to work. As the task force chairman said in his opening comments, "We seem to know what kind of business climate we want to create for our town in the next few years. Our next challenge is to decide how we can put our resources to work to make the best of the opportunities available to us."

The plan we had for the morning was to help the task force agree on a list of strategies. A strategy, as we defined it, was a promising group of vision-inspired actions, tasks or events that could be implemented with reasonable chance of success by one or more community groups or institutions within the next 12 months. As we explained it, the vision provides direction while strategies furnish the framework of actions needed to get there.

The task force was divided as before with me as facilitator for one group and my colleague for the other. Each group was asked to generate a list of ten to twelve prospective strategies using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The focusing question used to stimulate creative thought by members of the two groups was: What might we do to make our town the most economically viable community in the region? The word “we” was used deliberately to emphasize that success would depend on the extent to which local institutions were willing to be accountable for the vision. This was important since many of the town’s most important institutions were represented on the task force.

Late in the morning, each of the groups had developed a list of strategy proposals. During a plenary session, the merits of each proposal were discussed, some editing and rewording was done, priorities were set and a final list of 12 strategies was agreed upon. The following are four of the strategies approved by the task force that day as important components of their town’s 12-month action framework for economic development.

- 1. Organize a committee of educators and business leaders to identify work force skill deficiencies.*
- 2. Target small high-tech businesses and qualified professionals to relocate to the city.*
- 3. Develop an information technology infrastructure including an interactive Internet web site.*
- 4. Establish a technical information and education center and library.*

Commentary

We think of strategies as deliberate actions conceived through careful planning for the achievement of a purpose. The focus on strategies is a turning point in the strategic planning process. Participants who have begun to develop a clearer vision of what they want to achieve are now ready to devise methods for transforming the vision into reality.

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is a method often used in strategic planning to generate ideas in a group. It begins with the facilitator writing a question like the following on a flip chart in large letters: “What can we do through the organization to translate this dream into reality?” Since NGT is a small group activity, it may be necessary to subdivide a large training group into small groups of about seven by “counting off.”

In the NGT process, everyone is given four or five minutes to think about the question and to jot down their strategy proposals as terse, single-sentence statements. Proposals are taken up one-by-one, one person at a time, in order, and written down on flip charts. Duplicate proposals are eliminated. It is a good idea to use alternating colors on the flip chart and to give each proposal a consecutive number. This recording step can be done in about 15 minutes depending on group size. Each proposal is then clarified. No debate is permitted. It helps for the facilitator to explain what he or she thinks each proposal means, then to ask the originator: “Did we get it right?” and ask the group: “Do we all understand?” This can be done in about 10 minutes.

The last step is to vote on the strategy proposals. Each participant is given a set of four, colored adhesive-backed dots (can be purchased from most stationary stores). Each dot is a different color that denotes a voting value. A scoring scheme, like this, can be printed on a flip chart: Green, 1 point; Yellow, 2 points; Red, 3 points; and, Blue, 4 points.

Participants are told they can vote for the proposals of their choice by going to the place where the strategy proposals are listed and placing a dot in the vicinity of the proposals they have chosen as their priorities (only one dot per proposal). The voting takes about five minutes and the results are immediately apparent.

The NGT process can take up to three hours, particularly if there are several small groups working simultaneously and the results have to be merged into a common set of strategy priorities.

*If you don't know where you're going,
you might end up someplace else.
— Yogi Berra*

6. ACTION PLANNING

Case Study

We used our final afternoon with the task force to begin detailed action planning for each of the twelve strategies approved by the task force during the morning session. We wanted to convey to task force members the importance of breaking down each strategy into discrete tasks that could be assigned to an individual, group, or organization to carry out by a specific date. We stressed the importance of early action, timing and accountability to successful strategy implementation.

Before dividing into small groups, we briefed the task force on process mapping, a technique we had used successfully to identify and organize the various activities and tasks required for strategy implementation. A process map (see the following illustration), we explained, is created by arranging the various task descriptions into time frames and activity categories. Mapping, we

continued, helps action planners see the relationship of time to a group of tasks to be performed.

The use of categories often reveals to action planners additional tasks that otherwise might have been overlooked. My colleague urged task force members to include on the map at least one action step that could be taken immediately. In his opinion, this was essential for creating momentum or, as he put it, “get the strategy ball rolling.”

Three action planning teams were created and a member of each team was chosen by the team as its facilitator/reporter. The four strategies related to the attraction of new, high-tech businesses to the community were given to one of the teams for action planning. The other eight strategies were evenly divided among the second and third teams.

The results of these teams with action planning was similar to our experiences with other groups. Many ideas for implementing their assigned strategies were generated by the three teams. Process maps, like the one in the previous illustration, filled the walls of each breakout room. The process took all afternoon, however, and we had to postpone reporting by each of the teams in a plenary session to early that evening. During the plenary session it was apparent that there were gaps in the action plans (tasks).

Sample Process Map for Action Planning

	First Month	Second Month	Third Month
Organization	Mayor forms a committee of business leaders to develop and implement a business attraction plan.		
Inventory	Committee begins work work on an inventory of local resources (available land, buildings, human skills, etc.)	City manager's office develops a data base of strategies used by other towns to attract high-tech businesses	City manager's office develops profiles of suitable business prospects with a possible interest in relocating
Promotion			Committee prepares a marketing strategy for high-tech business attraction.

Commentary

Where we think of strategies as what to do, we think of action planning as how to do it. In action planning, the focus is on things that must be done by someone in particular within some kind of time frame in order for a strategy to be implemented successfully.

One way to develop the elements of an action plan is to use a technique called process mapping. The top priority strategies agreed to by the entire group are divided up and assigned for action planning to small groups. In each small group, participants, like in NGT, are asked to think of as many things as they can that must be done to successfully implement the first assigned strategy. Everyone is given four to five minutes of think time. Unlike the NGT, in the development of a process map, each participant writes down one action idea in big print (preferably with a felt-tipped marker) on a sheet of paper. This is followed by a second action idea, written on another sheet of paper, and so forth, until as many action ideas as possible are written down on separate sheets of paper.

While participants are working on their action ideas, someone serving the group as its facilitator can begin drawing a large process map on several sheets of newsprint taped next to one another horizontally on a wall of the room. At the top of each sheet the facilitator prints words to identify a time segment for action taking. For example, the facilitator might print with a marker in large letters at the top of the first sheet, the words “first month;” at the top of the second sheet the words “second month;” and, at the top of the third sheet, the words “third month.” The time interval, of course, might be days or weeks instead of months.

Participants are asked to tape their action idea sheets on the matrix under the appropriate time segment. The facilitator, with the group’s help, develops four or five action categories that cover the various types of action ideas described on the sheets of paper. Lines are then drawn horizontally to create rows for each of the headings and each is labeled to identify the category. The action idea sheets are moved up or down within the time category to the row in which they should be placed and duplicate ideas are discarded or merged with other proposed actions. A final step is for the facilitator to ask each participant to designate an appropriate person or work unit to be accountable for implementing each action idea. When agreement is reached, the name of each designee is printed on the action sheet. The same process is followed to action plan each of the assigned strategies, and this can take several hours depending upon the number of strategies.

After each small group has developed an action plan for each of its strategies, the various process maps are taken back to the large group meeting room and taped to a wall for general review and discussion. After the session, someone can be assigned to convert the data on each storyboard into a report

format for circulation and discussion with the parties accountable for key aspects of strategy implementation.

If time at the session is limited, the action-planning phase can be assigned to appropriate groups for completion. It is important, if this is done, to agree on a specific date for task completion.

In action planning, the importance of momentum is emphasized and quick results encouraged by having participants complete a first step in the action plan during or as soon as possible after the session.

CONCLUSION

As already mentioned, this guide is designed especially for the manager who is interested in knowing more about strategic planning from the facilitator's perspective. My intention in writing the guide has been to offer the realism of an actual experience with the facilitation of strategic planning in a local government through a case study situation supported by interpretive commentary. This concluding section of the guide reviews six important lessons that I have gained from my experiences as a facilitator in this case and many others.

- 1. Find a compelling reason.** Community leaders, and especially decision makers, must see an important purpose to be achieved by strategic planning for them to be active supporters and participants. If they don't get involved, the process is certain to fail. There are many reasons for getting involved. An organization may be faced with a threat that poses serious consequences for its future, like economic conditions facing the community in the case. Other reasons include a window of opportunity that suddenly opens or a turning point that could mean growth or imminent decline depending on the decisions made. Sometime, uncertainty about the future or a feeling of being "stuck" can provide the necessary motivation. It is up to the facilitator to help the community recognize its own compelling reason and to act on it.
- 2. Seek a committed group of players.** Strategic planning depends on the involvement of at least one individual who devoutly believes in the process and is willing to work hard to maintain the momentum and sustain the involvement of key decision makers. It helps if this individual is a respected leader in the community or an influential decision maker like the city manager in the case. Perhaps even more important is an individual who has an open mind about the issues and is willing to rely on the process for issue clarification so that effective answers can be found. While any community is fortunate to have one such individual, the involvement of more than one in the planning process can vastly improve the chances for success with strategic planning.
- 3. Use time effectively.** Strategic planning does not require a major financial investment. However, it does require a substantial commitment of time from those involved. Time is a scarce commodity for busy people like those who

will be attending a strategic planning workshop. For this reason, it is important for the process to be perceived by key decision makers as simple and quick. Participants will be more accepting of time demands if they know what they will be doing and why. Moreover, condensing the meeting time into two or three days and spreading them out over a 30 day period, as was done in the case, helps make the process seem less time-intensive to busy people.

- 4. Recognize strategic planning as an opportunity for thoughtful interaction among leaders.** An important benefit of strategic planning is the potential it has for the interchange of ideas and opinions among people who may, otherwise, rarely discuss anything with one another. In other words, a strategic planning process becomes an important justification to bring community leaders together to think, plan and act strategically. The results can have positive consequences that extend far beyond the strategic planning process itself. Such occasions rarely occur in most communities, and organizational and community performance suffer because of it.
- 5. Look for early successes.** Strategic planning is meant to be long term and continuing. It does not end with the close of the last group meeting. We have found that an early success, even the commitment of a key stakeholder to take on an important strategy or task before the planning process is complete, can energize the process and build momentum for action plan implementation. Sometimes, results from a strategic planning process may come in surprising ways or from unexpected sources. We were surprised in the case, for instance, at the number of types of events that were inspired either directly or indirectly by action planning strategies.
- 6. Value outside facilitation.** Although not indispensable to the strategic planning process, someone from outside the organization or community who has no self-interest in the issues and is skilled in process facilitation, can be helpful. An outside facilitator can provide an orderly way to conduct the process. The early emergence of a rational and orderly approach is important to maintain group interest and make productive use of the time spent in planning. The use of our services in the case provided a focus and direction for the planning sessions that had been missing in earlier meetings and was viewed by the community as a worthwhile and necessary investment.

In the final analysis, strategic planning is an exercise in community hope and courage. But it will work only if people want it to work. I hope this guide, and the workbook of which it is a part, will encourage you, as a manager, to promote the use of strategic planning in your own organization or community. I also hope it will increase your interest and enhance your ability to assist other organizations and communities to think and plan strategically for their own futures.

*And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
— T.S. Eliot*

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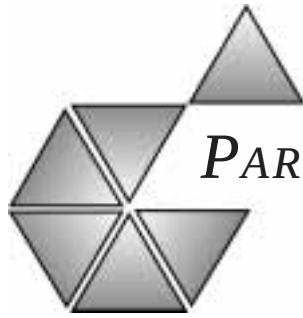
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PART 2: THE WORKSHOP

NOTE TO THE WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

This workshop, like other workshops in the series, is intended to be undertaken by an experienced trainer in a program attended by managers from various local self governments in Slovakia. We have included various types of learning activities and formats to provide trainers with considerable flexibility in adapting a workshop to the specific needs of participating managers. It has been our intention in developing these workshops to encourage you to incorporate your own experiences as a trainer to heighten the learning value of these learning materials for participating managers.

PURPOSE

This workshop consists of trainer-assisted designs designed to help managers acquire knowledge and skill related to creating shared visions for guiding their organizations purposefully into the future. Managers who register for the Visionary Strategist workshop will be expected to interact with each other in the various learning activities provided. It is hoped that they will take advantage of the opportunity to think creatively about using these strategic planning models to begin aligning their own organizations with the challenges that lie ahead.

CONTENT

A brief description of each learning activity is shown below with an approximation of the amount of time required. A workshop that includes all of these learning components will require three days. For a three-day program, you may use these designs in the exact order and manner presented. Or, if you prefer, you may modify them or even use content of your own to extend the length of the program or to make it more relevant to the objectives of a particular training situation.

We are making the assumption that participants will use the model to plan the resolution of their organizational problems or realization of their opportunities in one of two ways: (1) individually and in small participant clusters with similar types of problems and opportunities, or (2) in teams of managers who are attending the workshop from the same organization.

4.1 WARM-UP EXERCISE

Participants recall a time of great organizational uncertainty and reflect on how realistic awareness of the present can improve management's perception of the future. (60 minutes)

4.2 TRAINER PRESENTATION

Brief overview of the unique characteristics of the local government manager as both visionary and strategist. (30 minutes)

4.3 SESSION ON ORGANIZATIONAL VISIONING

Participants develop organizational vision statements working in small groups. (90 minutes)

4.4 TRAINER PRESENTATION

Brief presentation on strategic planning as an important management process. (30 minutes)

4.5 SESSION ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL USE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Participants use a case study to evaluate the potential strengths and benefits of a strategic planning process in their own organizations. (60 minutes)

4.6 SESSION ON EVALUATING STRATEGIC PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

Participants engage in a role play exercise that involves the preparation and evaluation of alternative proposals for assisting a local government to develop a strategic plan. (3-4 hours)

4.7 RE-ENTRY EXERCISE

Participants develop action plans for applying important concepts of organization awareness, visioning and strategic planning to their own performance as local government managers. (90 minutes)

4.1 WARM UP EXERCISE

PURPOSE

This exercise is meant to help participants recall a time of great organizational uncertainty and reflect on how realistic awareness of the present can improve management's perception of the future.

TIME REQUIRED: 60 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Ask participants to recall as vividly as possible a time earlier in their careers as managers when each of their organizations was faced with profound uncertainties about the future. With this in mind, ask participants to write answers to the following three questions on a sheet of paper:
 - *What was going on then?*
 - *If you could go back to that time, knowing what you do today, what would have been a useful scenario about the future for your organization to have adopted then?*
 - *What prevented you and others from recognizing what seems so obvious today?*
2. In a minute or two, after everyone seems to have something written, ask participants to identify themselves by name, title and organization and then to read what they have written. Make notes on their ideas on a sheet of newsprint. Then, create several small groups and give each group the task of preparing a definition of the manager as "visionary strategist" from the information on newsprint. After a few minutes, ask for reports and record the results on newsprint.

4.2 TRAINER PRESENTATION

PURPOSE

This presentation is to familiarize participants with the local government manager in the role of visionary and strategist.

TIME REQUIRED: 30 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Deliver a short presentation (30 minutes) on the role of the manager as visionary and strategist. Concentrate on the uncertainties of the times we live in and the manager's responsibility for looking beyond today and engaging others to do the same. Define the unique characteristics of the manager as "visionary strategist." Differentiate between awareness as a way of accurately perceiving things as they are (the status quo) and vision as a compelling picture of the future it is hoped to be. Describe the central role of strategic planning as a management process for "*positioning the organization and the community for events and circumstances that are anticipated in the future.*"
2. Outlined information on note cards may help you cover the information systematically and stay on schedule. Ask questions from time to time during the presentation as a check on participants' comprehension and to focus their attention. Provide real-life illustrations of the points you are making to aid comprehension. Find ways when possible to link your material with the knowledge and experience the participants already have. Augment the presentation with visual aids including pre-printed newsprint sheets and overhead transparencies as a further aid to comprehension. End with a summary of key points or ask participants for this as a test of retention.

4.3 SESSION ON ORGANIZATIONAL VISIONING

PURPOSE

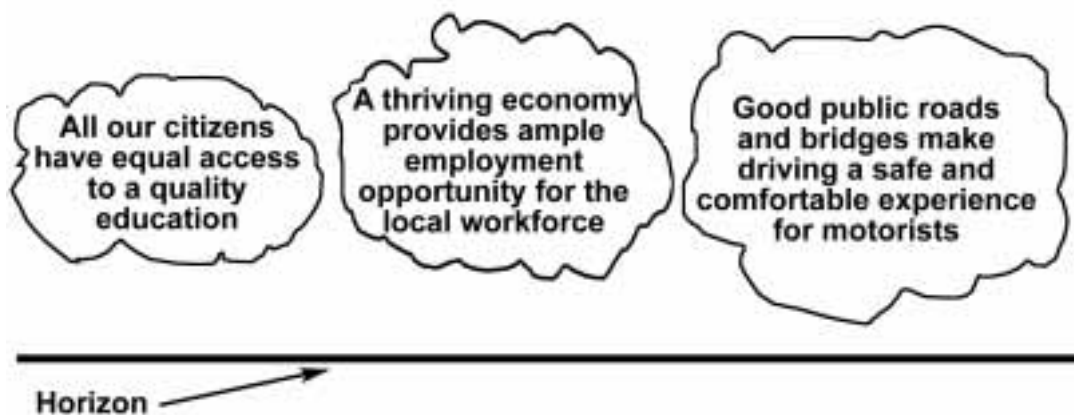
This session is intended to acquaint participants with the process of organizational visioning.

TIME REQUIRED: 90 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Tell participants they will be working in small groups of five to seven participants on the development of organizational vision statements. Suggest the composition of some small groups be participants from small cities, other participants from large cities and the rest from cities of medium size. When the groups have been formed, hand out a worksheet called *Images of the Future* (Handout No. 1) and read aloud the instructions at the top of the worksheet. Then assign each small group a work area and tell participants to complete the task and return to share their vision statements with one another in approximately one hour.

Trainer's Note. Here is a variation on the visioning exercise suggested by a group of Slovak managers participating in a visionary strategist workshop. You may want to consider it. What they had in mind is for the facilitator to cut some cardboard cards into cloud shapes. Each of the work groups in the preceding exercise is to be given one of the cloud-shaped cards and asked to print the group's composite vision statement on the card. Before the group reports, each group is to be asked to tape its card to a wall of the training room above an imaginary horizon drawn by the facilitator.



2. At the end of an hour, reconvene the participants and ask for reports from each small group. After all groups have reported, ask participants:
 - *What difficulties did anyone have in creating a vision?* (Note: Sometimes people asked to create a vision say they don't know what they want. This may be measure of despair or a reluctance to take responsibility for their organization or work unit. A vision is an expression of hope; without hope, it is difficult to create a vision.)
 - *How close is the vision developed by your group to what members of the group would actually want for their cities?* (Note: Sometimes visionaries will choose less than they want because they don't believe success is possible and don't want to risk failure or be disappointed. Or they feel what they want and feel is important is contrary to the wishes of others in their organization and they risk reprisal, censure or worse for supporting it. They may choose to sacrifice what they want, therefore, and play it safe, simply going along with someone else's vision.)
 - *What would happen if you used a visioning exercise like this with people in your own organization or work unit?*

IMAGES OF THE FUTURE

A vision is an image of the future you seek to create, described in the present tense as if it were happening now. A statement of our "vision" describes where we want to go as an organization and what we expect things to be like when we get there. The word vision comes from the Latin *videre*, "to see." The link to seeing is significant: the richer and more vivid in detail the image is, the more compelling it will be as a force to inspire and direct the organization.¹

CREATE YOUR IMAGE OF THE FUTURE...

Start by thinking about what is most important about your organization and its most fundamental reason for existence. If the organization was functioning at its best, what would that look like. What would people be doing together? Achieving together? Feeling about their accomplishments and about one another? Consider some important current events or milestones that you see as building blocks for your vision. For example, you may be introducing a new service for which you have high hopes; are working to establish vital and productive new relationships with important community groups; may be seeking a coveted award for your organization or the community. What words would you use to describe what you see, hear and feel as you construct a vision for your organization? Remember to state what you are thinking about in the present tense as if it is happening now.

MY VISION

The image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

When everyone in your group has completed a vision statement (this should take no more than 30 minutes) share the resulting statements with one another. Capture the common themes among the various statements on a sheet of newsprint. As time permits, develop a single, composite vision for a municipality in your group's size category. Critique your vision by comparing it with the qualities of a great vision (Handout No. 2) and making further changes as agreed. Be prepared to report the results at the plenary session when requested by the facilitator.

COMPOSITE VISION STATEMENT

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

QUALITIES OF A GREAT VISION²

We know we create a great vision when it has three qualities:

1. *It comes from the heart.* A vision is in some ways un-reasonable. The heart knows no reason. When our vision asks too much of us, we should begin to trust it.
2. *We, alone, can make this statement.* The statement needs to be recognizable as ours. It needs to be personal, and those who know us should be able to recognize who it came from.
3. *It is radical and compelling.* A vision dramatizes our wishes. This makes it radical and demanding. Radical in the best sense of service rather than rejection. Our willingness to take a unique stand is what empowers us.

4.4 TRAINER PRESENTATION

PURPOSE

This presentation is to familiarize participants with the local government manager in the role of visionary and strategist.

TIME REQUIRED: 30 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Prepare the presentation based on information covered by the preceding essay. Concentrate on the purpose of strategic planning and the conditions under which it can be used for greatest benefit to local governments. Compare several processes in common use with emphasis on John Bryson's ten step model.
2. Outlined information on note cards may help you cover the information systematically and stay on schedule. Ask questions from time to time during the presentation as a check on participants' comprehension and to focus their attention. Provide real-life illustrations of the points you are making to aid comprehension. Find ways when possible to link your material with the knowledge and experience the participants already have. Augment the presentation with visual aids including pre-printed newsprint sheets and overhead transparencies as a further aid to comprehension. End with a summary of key points or ask participants for this as a test of retention.

4.5 SESSION ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL USE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

PURPOSE

This session is intended to help participants evaluate the potential strengths and benefits of using a strategic planning process in their own organizations.

TIME REQUIRED: 60 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Distribute copies of a case study, *Developing Economic Strategies Through Community-wide Engagement* (Handout). Ask participants to read the case. After participants have read the case, divide them into small groups of five to seven. In their groups, ask them to discuss and answer these questions about the case.
 - How does the conference described in the case differ from other conferences in which you have participated?
 - What do you see as the principal strengths of this kind of conference for carrying out a strategic planning process?
 - What kind of support from management would be necessary for a conference of this type to be a success?
2. After about 20 minutes, ask volunteers from the various groups to report on their group's answer to the three questions. Discussion.

CASE STUDY — DEVELOPING ECONOMIC STRATEGIES THROUGH COMMUNITY-WIDE ENGAGEMENT

The authors have had many experiences in helping local government organizations and communities carry out strategic planning efforts. One of the more interesting experiences involved a Regional Planning Commission in a medium sized, mid-west city in the United States. The Commission asked one of the authors to help organize and conduct a strategic planning conference on economic development for the metropolitan area. The overall mission of the conference was "to provide a forum within which public and private leaders in the Miami Valley could reach consensus on a) the major economic development challenges and opportunities to be addressed within the next five years; and b) a strategy for further consideration and action." It was two days in length and involved just over 200 leaders representing public organizations, private corporations, neighborhood groups, elected officials, non-profit agencies, the media, professional and business organizations, and agricultural associations.

The conference was initiated by a formal presentation and open discussion about the economic conditions of the metropolitan area. The past decade was reviewed in terms of: a) shifts in employment (the region had lost several thousand jobs in primary manufacturing over a 7-8 year period); b) retail and service trends; and, c) the role of support institutions (e.g., government, education, social service) during that period. The presentation, which was based on a research document, also framed the regional economy within the context of national and international economic trends and made certain projections about the near future.

Given this background information and data, each individual participant was asked to identify the five most important economic development challenges or opportunities facing the region at that time.

The terms *challenge* and *opportunity* were defined in the following manner:

- A *challenge* is an economic circumstance which is currently detrimental to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be eliminated or diminished (an economic liability).
- An *opportunity* is an economic circumstance with is currently advantageous to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be exploited (an economic asset).

Twenty small work groups of about ten members each were formed with the task of discussing their individual lists for clarification and understanding and reaching a group consensus on the five most important economic development challenges and opportunities for the region. Each subgroup presented their list to a plenary session, which involved all 200 participants.

While there was a potential of 100 different issues, many were duplications, and the final list involved 31 different statements. These were organized by the workshop staff into a survey questionnaire (during the late afternoon tea break!) and each participant was asked (following the tea break and prior to adjourning for the day) to once again vote for what he or she considered the five most important from the combined list of 31. Participants were also told to rank order the statements from one to five: one being most important; two, next important, etc. The staff tabulated the results that evening by cumulative weight (e.g., a number one vote was given a weight of five) and by the number of individuals voting for any single statement of challenge or opportunity. From the voting results, eight issues were clearly top priority taking into account both methods of calculation.

On the following day, the results of the voting and tabulation were announced to the group and eight work groups were formed to address each of the top priority issues identified in the previous day's sessions. Each participant was given an opportunity to self-select the topic he or she wanted to help address based on interest, experience and potential contribution to its resolution. As it turned out, we had one very large group, several medium sized groups and one with only "a handful" of participants. While this concerned the consultant (who tends to think groups of more than 10 participants are a bit unwieldy and unproductive), each group performed to his expectations and satisfaction and carried out the following tasks:

- identified the desired outcome of the challenge or opportunity their group was considering (the goal or objective to be achieved);
- identified alternative courses of action that could be taken to achieve the desired outcome;
- developed an action plan for achieving their desired outcome or goal.

Each work group reported its recommendations to the total membership of the conference toward the end of the second and final day. At that time, there were discussions about each of the recommendations and proposed action plans. Decisions were made to assign responsibilities to specific officers and organizations to begin implementing the recommendations.

The final proceedings of the conference were published and made available to the participants and a wide range of citizens and organizations in the region. The strategic economic development plan, forged in those two hectic days of discussion, became both policy and a work plan for the Regional Planning Commission. In a return visit to the region nearly a year later, the consultant learned that many of the recommendations had already been implemented while others were still in progress.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Conferences, of this kind, do not happen serendipitously. They take careful planning, and rigorous managing once they are underway. This conference was particularly difficult because it involved so many people with varied backgrounds, experience and expectations. Some of the things that were done in preparation for the conference (which are applicable to most planning conferences) were:

- *To be clear about roles and responsibilities* (who will do what when).
- *To enlist help and to train participants in the process.* (In this case, it meant identifying and training 20 small work group facilitators who would be responsible for helping each group accomplish the tasks assigned them). The training only took two or three hours on the afternoon before the conference opened because most of the facilitators already had experience in leading small task group discussions.
- *To be clear about the group tasks and to be certain they would be conveyed to each group in a consistent, clear and unambiguous fashion.* If the group tasks are unclear or ambiguous, the products of group efforts will probably be unclear and ambiguous. If the group facilitators each describe the task differently, the products become impossible to assemble into a coherent plan.
- *To be willing to make changes, as needed, as the conference progressed.* While it is important to plan in a rigorous manner, it is just as important, at times, to change those plans as they are being carried out. There is nothing like the implementation of a well laid plan to expose its frailties. Planning workshops and conferences of the kind just described, have a way of creating a life of their own. The effective facilitator must not only be aware of what is happening but to take advantage of it. For example, it was assumed that groups for the final day should be fairly uniform in size to work effectively. As it turned out, the participants wanted no part of being assigned to a group arbitrarily. They preferred to self select around their individual interests. To have insisted on uniform groups would have demotivated many individuals who had a valuable contribution to make to the discussion and final recommendations. Given this, the consultant made changes in his own thinking about what was important and how the conference should be managed.

Conferences and workshops are excellent vehicles for helping organizations and communities carry out a strategic planning process. They can become the center piece of the planning process, as was the case with the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission efforts, or they can be one of a number of events organized to facilitate the overall strategic planning process.

4.6 SESSION ON EVALUATING STRATEGIC PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

PURPOSE

This session is intended to help participants critically examine alternatives for strategic planning.

TIME REQUIRED: FROM 3-4 HOURS

PROCESS

1. Explain that the purpose of this exercise is to help managers examine critically the pros and cons of various approaches to strategic planning that might be undertaken by local governments. Describe the exercise as a role play in which one group acts as a proposal review team for the local government; another group (several groups in the numbers permit) develops a proposal (or proposals) to assist the local government to develop a strategic plan; a third task group observes the proposal presentation(s) made by the consultant team or teams to the management team. It is the task of the third group to assess the presentations and responses to the presentations and to give feedback on both the content and process in each case.

Trainer's Note: The exercise is designed to provide a bit of competition among planning consultants, so the exercise should include at least two consulting teams and ideally, three. Processing more than three would be too time consuming and would make it difficult to discern qualitative differences in the proposals.

2. Handout task statements for each of the role play groups. Written task statements for a) the management team (Handout No. 1); b) the teams that will develop the proposals (Handout No. 2); and c) a team to evaluate the work of the other two (Handout No. 3) can be found below.
3. Having circulated the task statements, you are ready to divide the training participants into the various groups listed above. Each team should have no fewer than 4-5 participants and no more than 8 or 9. This means you can adjust the training exercise to accommodate as few as 16 (4 x 4) and as many as 45 (9 x 5). This assumes three planning consultant teams of nine members each).
4. Divide the training participants into the various task groups: one management team; two or three planning consulting teams who will

compete for the contract; and an evaluation team. Tell the teams they have 45 minutes to prepare their presentations or other pre-role play tasks; that there will be 20 minutes for each presentation of the plans; and 20-45 minutes to select the winning consultant proposal and allow feedback by the evaluation team. Assign each team a space to work and newsprint and materials they will need to plan and make their presentations.

5. Reconvene the groups after 45 minutes. (In the meantime, set up the training room to resemble a meeting place where such presentations might be made to a review committee. The evaluation team should be located in an unobtrusive manner but close enough so its members can hear and observe what is happening.)

ROLE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Your team represents a local government that has decided to develop a strategic plan for the community and will be hiring a planning consultant/facilitator to assist in the process. (The planning is to be conducted by local officials and, perhaps, citizen representatives — not by an outside firm or group of planners.) Your role is to develop a set of criteria for evaluating the consultant's proposal to the elected council and management team of the local government and to conduct a meeting where the proposals will be presented. After the proposals have been presented, your team will hold a short discussion to decide which of the consulting groups you will recommend for the award of a contract.

ROLE OF THE CONSULTING TEAM

Your team is to develop a proposal to assist the local government develop a strategic plan. (Assume a city of 100,000 population, council-administrator type of government, and the usual amenities and problems for an urban center of this size.) The strategic plan is to be developed primarily by local officials and citizens. Your role is to facilitate this process.

Since time is short, you are expected to present your approach in outline form (the planning process you are proposing) and the outcomes you hope to achieve. Don't try to write a full-blown proposal. Given these parameters, you will want to concentrate on: a) how you would organize and facilitate the strategic planning process; b) who you would want to involve; c) how long it would take; d) the goals and objectives of the planning process; e) the expected outcomes to be achieved; f) resources required; and g) any other details you believe would make your proposal competitive and attractive.

ROLE OF THE EVALUATION TEAM

Your team will be expected to observe the presentation of proposals by the consulting teams, their interaction with the management team and the final discussion when the management team decides who it will recommend be employed as the planning consultant. To prepare for these tasks, you will want to develop criteria for evaluating the plans and the final selection of the consultant to help carry it out.

4.7 RE-ENTRY PLANNING EXERCISE

PURPOSE

This exercise is intended to encourage participants to apply important insights about organization awareness, visioning and strategic planning when they return home to their own management responsibilities.

TIME REQUIRED: 90 MINUTES

PROCESS

1. Explain the exercise as a way of helping participants practice increased organizational awareness and vision and to apply the concepts of strategic planning introduced during the workshop.
2. Have participants write individually on sheets of paper the two or three most valuable insights gained from the workshop. After about 10 minutes, ask participants, one at a time, to describe briefly what they have written. Record each idea on a sheet of newsprint. Give participants another five minutes to review the results. Then ask the group to discuss:
 - which of these ideas they might seriously consider implementing in their own management work, and
 - what might be done to remove any anticipated obstacles to their successful implementation.
3. At the conclusion of this group activity ask each participant to complete a re-entry planning worksheet (see handout on the next page). When participants have completed the task, ask them to join in groups of three to discuss their re-entry plans with one another.
4. Reconvene participants after about 30 minutes and allow time for a discussion of any lingering concerns about implementing re-entry plans.

PLANNING WORKSHEET

As a result of my participation in this workshop, I intend to take the steps outlined below on returning to my organization: [describe your plan]

The principal resistance to my effort I am likely to encounter on initiating the plan described above is: [explain the resistance]

The most important thing I can do to prevent or lessen the resistance to the plan explained above is to: [describe what you can do]

REFERENCES

¹Adapted from Senge, Peter, et al. *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 302.

²Block, Peter,. *The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work* (San Francisco, Ca,: Jossey-Bass, Publishers, 1987), p. 115.



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