

ISSUES RELATED TO THE SUCCESS OF ORGANIZATION PLANNING

AUTHOR, BIRGE D. Reichard Ph.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	P. 1
II.	REASONS FOR PLANNING FAILURES	
	A. Lack of Integration	P. 1
	B. Communication Problems	P. 6
	C. Participation and Group Process Problems	P. 8
	D. Need for Iterative Planning	P. 10
	E. Other Issues	P. 11
III.	CONCLUSION	P. 12

I. INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of any kind of strategy or planning process, whether it be in the form of an operating plan, a marketing plan, a strategic plan, or a human resources plan must take account of the ways and means by which it will be carried out as well as the technical or content aspects of the plan. All too often, the plan may be technically sound and appear to achieve intended organization goals. However, the longer term result of many planning efforts is an attractive binder that sits on the shelf and receives only lip service from the population of managers who were intended to use it. What makes planning fail? Or, more specifically, if the information in the plan is sound and that information is presented in a usable form, what are the reasons why an otherwise good plan is not utilized?

II. REASONS FOR PLANNING FAILURES

A. LACK OF INTEGRATION

In a general sense, many of the reasons can be described as a lack of integration. If one were to view a plan the same way that social scientists view an organization, i.e. as a system of interrelated parts, it is safe to say that most plans suffer from a lack of integration. Particular plans are likely to be seen as

independent of other plans rather than being related to each other. Let me give you an example from my own consulting experience.

Most often, organizational consultants enter a client organization as a result of a problem the management has identified. Frequently, the problem presented is subsequently diagnosed or redefined as a different, or sometimes more extensive, problem.

A typical example of a presenting statement is "We don't seem to have people identified, or ready, for key management positions in the quantities we would like or at the time we would like. Furthermore, we seem to spend inordinate amounts of many peoples' time filling jobs, but after we're done, we're not sure we've really selected the right person."

On the surface, it would appear that the problem may be an inability to make timely and valid assessments of managers' promotability or potential, and the solution would be to develop a more valid and reliable individual assessment method or program. But if the consultant or human resources manager considers the many organizational activities that are related to decision making about managerial potential, the following also come to mind as areas which may require attention to achieve the

desired goal:

1. Job Design and Description - What skills, knowledge attitudes are required to do a particular job?
2. Does the Sucession Plan provide an internal candidate for the job? If not, why not? Or, if so, why isn't the plan being used? Why is there a need to recruit?
3. Recruitment/Assessment Centres - Were the attributes required to perform well in key jobs part of the original criteria for selection of current managerial talent?
4. Performance Management - Do you have an effective program and one that is used by your managers? Assuming that you have candidates who meet the job requirements, are the best performers being identified and are the problems interfering with good performance identified and acted upon?
5. Objective Setting - Part of measuring performance is measuring a person's accomplishment against stated objectives. Is there an individual objec-

tive setting process and are individual objectives connected to organization goals? Are those organization goals in pursuit of the organization's mission?

6. Compensation - Does the compensation plan especially reward high performance? Is it related to the performance management system? Is what is said to be rewarded in fact rewarded?

7. Training and Development - As job requirements become clarified and as managers' performance and promotability are assessed, are training and development programs available to correct deficiencies and develop the competencies identified in key jobs?

8. Career Planning and Pathing - Are the individual's needs and aspirations a part of an organization staffing decision? What help is provided for the individual to sort out his or her aspirations? Are career paths or tracks to key jobs identifiable and are they made known so individuals can make informed choices when seeking or accepting a new position?

9. Organization Planning - Are the key jobs, with their required skills and knowledge, going to remain the same over the next 3 to 5 years or will new products and services or new environmental demands change job design and job requirements? Are you planning for the organization as it is now or as it will be?

These and a host of other activities are related to the readiness and availability of managers when openings occur. The dilemma for the consultant or human resources manager is how to respond to the problem presented, i.e. succession planning, stay in touch with other interacting plans, programs and processes, yet not become overwhelmed with complexity.

It is clear that the ready availability of qualified people in an organization may not be alleviated by the development of a management succession plan, unless the planning process provides for examination and integration of other related areas. Just as the various components of the human resources plan must be integrated, so too must the human resources plan be connected to or integrated with the operations or business plan, which must be integrated with the strategic plan. Our example illustrates that human resources plan which is not well integrated will likely be

connected only to short term problems and will plan for the present based on current job requirements or on the basis of the current skills, knowledge and attitudes of people in the organization.

B. COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Another general reason for planning failures is that many planners - and senior executives who commission those planners - fail to view planning as a communication process. For example, most plans (especially those of a strategic or longer term nature) require some "futuring" and "visioning" on the part of those involved in building the plan. That is, people must share their best guesses of potential internal as well as environmental events and say "what if...?" to a number of possible scenarios. Then they must be able to reach agreement upon the scenario(s) to be developed, identify the problems or opportunities the organization will be facing strategically for each scenario and agree upon resource allocation. Such "futuring" is a rather abstract process, and managers, much preferring the concrete, will often avoid such discussions. In addition, such discussions draw heavily upon one's personal values, aspirations, and beliefs (as compared to "facts"), and require a level of self-awareness and interpersonal communication for which most managers are often not well prepared. Value-laden discussions also have a high probability for conflict, another arena for which managers are

often not prepared. Therefore, important conflicts are often suppressed or avoided. For successful planning efforts, the goal is conflict management rather than conflict prevention. The nature of effective organization planning is that it must create an arena where people air the differences in their values, beliefs, perceptions and functional responsibilities - in such a way that a realistic and useful plan can be developed.

Frequently, managers are so focused on internal organizational problems that they are less able to focus on the state of affairs in the environment, including the larger environment inside the organization. As a result, in order to effectively participate in various kinds of planning, most managers need preparation for becoming more attuned to the events and dynamics outside of their "compartments" of the organization.

Without such help, the input of those managers to organizational planning may be irrelevant; so, then, may be the plans.

Plans represent support to the personal and departmental goals of some individuals, but they also represent a threat to others. It is understandable, therefore, that the reactions of some managers to organization plans is to find both overt and covert ways to keep them from being developed or, more importantly, implemented. Resistance can take the form of asking interminable and convoluted questions, attacking the planners,

not showing up for planning meetings and many other forms of passive-aggressive and undermining behavior, both subtle and flagrant. Information that derives from planning implies change, and can be threatening. One of the ways that organizations typically deal with threatening information is to "shoot the messenger" - or, in this case, the plan, the planner or the planning process.

C. PARTICIPATION AND GROUP PROCESS PROBLEMS

The utilization of information is largely related to how it is collected. The "participation" theme in management may be hackneyed nowadays but it is nonetheless true. People are more likely to understand, accept and use information in a plan when they help to create it. Recipients of planning information must be involved in its collection and analysis. In the case of management succession planning, managers in various parts of the organization - both vertically and horizontally - must participate in both the nomination and validation of candidates for key positions. Participation in planning is not necessarily the same as authority to make decisions about the plan. Managers in contemporary organizations increasingly are coming to grips with the concept of having responsibility without having decision making authority. Reluctance to allow participation fosters narrower perspectives and territorialism - a barrier to integration, which has already been identified as a key to

successful planning efforts. The extension of individual managers' territorialism is intergroup and interdepartmental territorialism, which is a further barrier to the quality and utilization of planning information.

If managers must do collectively what they have historically done individually (e.g. make performance and promotability decisions), they must be increasingly able to live comfortably and function effectively in groups. Most managers of work groups manage a collection of individuals through one to one relationships. They do not often see the group itself as another, and significant, entity to manage. The invisible group provides the context for interaction. If this context is supportive, if the norms are conducive to effective problem solving and risk taking, then the individual members will more likely perform better.

There are specific skill requirements for managing group processes such as conflict management (not, I repeat, prevention), group problem solving methods, and consensus decision making. Frequently, the initiation of organization planning requires working with participants to equip, encourage and relax them around working more effectively in groups.

The mention of groups brings up the subject of the planning

group. Frequently, in the interests of efficiency, a specialized group is formed to put together a plan that the rest of the organization will use. This is seen as an efficient approach that saves the time of many people and the distraction from other essential duties. However, this approach also results in an isolated group doing organizational planning and then presenting their plan to the ultimate users. This is not likely to be effective for the reasons already mentioned - recipients of the plan have not been involved in its data compilation and analysis, nor in the rationale for the decisions based on that data. Therefore, the only people who understand the plan and are committed to it are the members of the planning group.

D. NEED FOR ITERATIVE PLANNING

Organization planning of a strategic or long term nature needs to be an iterative process. That is, data should be collectively gathered, analyzed and redistributed for refining in a series of repetitive steps. Planning often involves performing the steps of collection, analysis and proposal of action more than one time. This approach taxes the patience of action-oriented managers who seek a one-shot approach which is seen to be more efficient. Again, beware of such efficiencies. Not only is the iterative method more likely to develop a better plan, but it also accounts for something we know about the way people respond to learning and change, namely that people rarely

appreciate something new the first time they encounter it. A iterative process enables participants to revisit "new" data, see "new" interpretations and potential benefits, leading to true understanding and commitment.

Planning is not a linear, top down or "neat" process. Rather, it can be pictured as many busy particles swirling around, making contact, changing course, evolving into different shapes - but eventually taking on definition and form. While strategic planning, for example, is appropriately conceived as a top-down process, strategic planners must interact with operational planners. Each gives information to the other which affects how they will proceed. Similarly, bosses' views of their objectives are altered by conversation with subordinates about their objectives.

E. OTHER ISSUES

Two other process issues which affect the development and utilization of organization plans are worth mentioning. One is the "burnout" of planners. Because of all the issues described so far in this paper, it should be clear that an enlightened planning manager is likely to encounter a great deal of resistance as he or she attempts to proceed on the basis of the planning principles mentioned here. The experience for the planning manager is like pushing a river - a continual battle to

get the job done properly. Seldom does the planner get thanked or rewarded for putting a whole network of key managers in uncomfortable situations. In addition, good planners are on the cutting edge of the futures of their organizations and are, often, the first to be exposed. It is a risky position! This is one of the many reasons why senior executives must be the initiators, supporters and leaders in planning efforts - not only because much of this work is appropriate to their level of responsibility but also because it requires their involvement and leadership. To some extent, sharing of information is sharing of power, and top management leadership is required to set an example of collaboration in the best interests of the organization. This kind of planning and the psycho-social dynamics it evokes must be actively supported at the top or the plan will not make much difference in the functioning of the organization. A lot of time, energy and money is spent on planning. Without top level leadership and involvement, it may not be worth the human or financial cost.

Another deterrent to good planning efforts results from key personnel changes in the midst of plan development or implementation. The appointment of a key manager who doesn't appreciate or support participative data collection and analysis, group problem-solving meetings, conflict management versus avoidance or suppression, etc., can undo the dedicated effort of

an army of other people. Thus, periods of significant planning activity are especially critical times for appointment and/or promotion decisions.

III. CONCLUSION

Finally, any plan which has endured and come to fruition in the face of all of the obstacles described here needs to be supported once it is in place. There are always going to be individual motives which will, if not monitored, run counter to the organization plan. Deviations from the plan should only be allowed after very thoughtful review by top management. For example, if a succession plan contains one or more suitable candidates, then a successor should only be chosen from that list. If the organization demands frequent exceptions, it is a signal that the plan or the planning process needs to be re-examined.

On the other hand a goal in a plan can become a gaol if plans are not continually monitored to account for changing conditions. The rapidly changing environment makes long range planning increasingly difficult. Indeed, a long range plan in 1970 may have taken a 5 year view whereas a long range plan today may be a 2 year view or less. In any event, following a plan requires discipline for implementation.

An integrated plan which is developed in accordance with sound communication principles is a big job. It requires the mobilization of many resources, and demands a high degree of maturity, self-direction and commitment on the part of both the planners and the organization as a whole. However, participation in good planning is one of the most effective management development programs available.