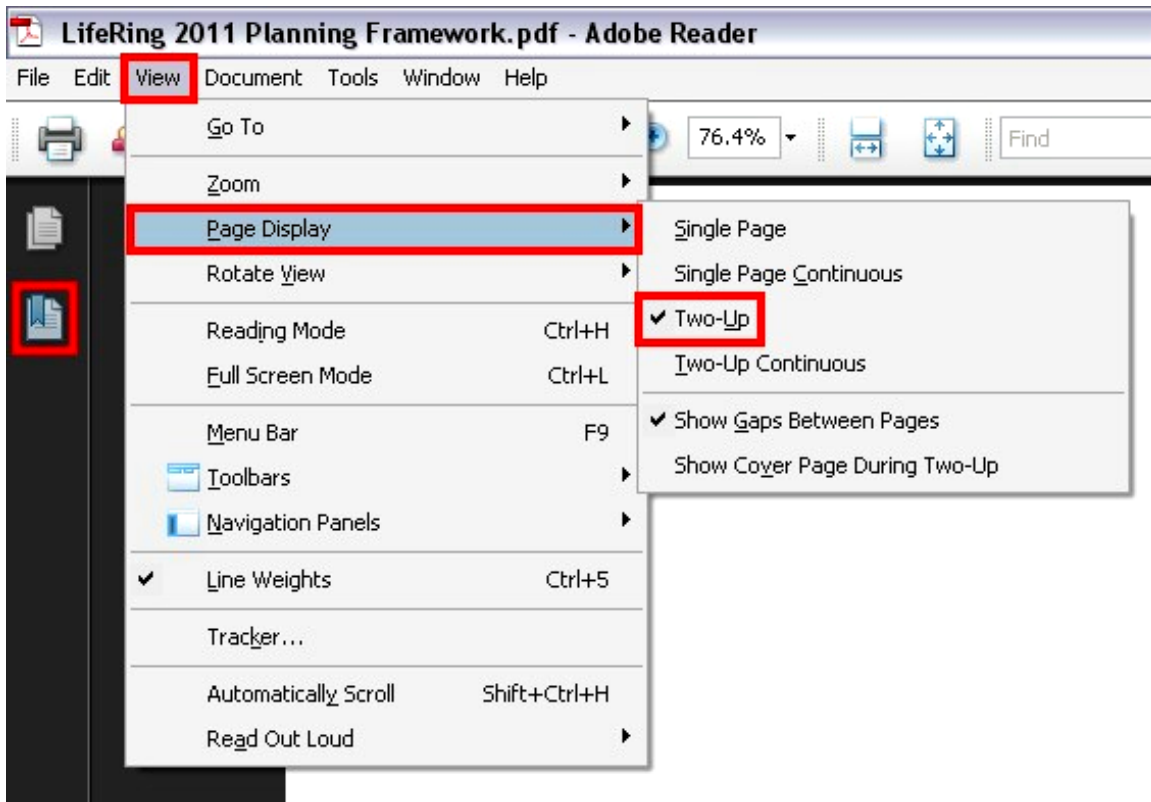


THIS DOCUMENT IS DESIGNED TO BE VIEWED TWO PAGES AT A TIME WITH A DOCUMENT MAP.

If you have received a PDF:

Please set Adobe PDF Viewer to VIEW, Page Display, Two-Up, and select the Bookmarks icon at left.



If you have received a Word Document:

Please set Microsoft Word to VIEW Print Layout, Document Map, Two Pages.



If you have received a Word Document:

THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE OPENED DIRECTLY BY MICROSOFT WORD 2007 AND LATER VERSIONS.

This document is in a format used by Microsoft Word 2007 and later versions, with a .docx file extension. If you have forwarded it to others who are unable to open the document, please direct them to open and edit the 2007 Office release file in an earlier version of Word by downloading file converters. On the computer with an earlier version of Office, go to the [Download Center](#) and download the Microsoft Office Compatibility Pack for 2007 Office Word, Excel and PowerPoint File Formats.

LIFERING PLANNING RATIONALE
LIFERING'S 2011 YEAR OF PLANNING



DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Title | LIFERING PLANNING RATIONALE

Abstract | This rationale represents the theory, model, and decisions that provide the basis for LifeRing's 2011 Planning Framework. These will guide the planning process. Where possible, processes were selected that stress positive progress rather than problem solving. Systems theory and processes based in appreciative inquiry and dialogue are the guiding models.

Author | Lynn Cullens, LynnCullens@gmail.com, 916-606-1610

Revision Date | 06/22/2011

Last Publication | 6/22/2011

This Hard Copy Printed | 06/22/2011

Status | Draft for Confidential Review

File Name | C:\Documents and Settings\Lynn\My Documents\LifeRing General\LifeRing Planning\LifeRing Plan Framework\LifeRing Planning Rationale\LifeRing 2011 Planning Rationale.docx

Folder Name | LifeRing Planning Rationale

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction2
- OVERVIEW3
 - 2011 Year of Planning3
 - Goals for the Year4
- MANAGEMENT5
 - Tensions in Planning5
 - Planning Decisions6
 - Managing Tensions: Balancing Polarity7
- DEFINITIONS9
 - Types of Planning 10
 - Planning Foundations 11
 - Goals, Objectives, Outcomes and Initiatives 13
 - Strategies, Scenarios, and Tactics 15
 - Describing Organizational Activities 16
 - Evaluation Elements 17
 - Elements of a Standard Nonprofit Plan 19
- LONG RANGE MODEL 21
 - Framework for a Long Range Plan 21
 - Levels of Detail 21
 - Stages in the Long Range Planning Process 23
 - Structuring Potential Actions 26
- STRATEGIC MODEL 27
 - Overview of 7-S Strategic Planning 27
 - Strategic Planning Methods 29
 - Analyzing Progress and Performance 30
 - Assessing Capacity 31
- TESTING THE PLAN 33
 - Multiple Tests for Adequacy 33
 - Tools for Evaluating a Plan 34
- PLANNING PROCESSES 35
 - Systems Approach 35
 - Dialogic Process 37
 - Dialogue about Potential Actions 39
 - Dialogue about the Plan Itself 41
 - Appreciative Inquiry 44
 - Soar 49
- SUGGESTED READING 51
 - Books 51
 - Articles 52

INTRODUCTION

The planning rationale is intended to guide the development of a comprehensive long range plan that details and organizes the potential activities of the organization. At the end of the planning year, a draft long range plan will be presented to the LifeRing Board of Directors. In the meantime, a variety of processes occur to fill out the framework, organize and wordsmith the plan.

It can be difficult to have everyone agree on a planning process, even before creating the plan itself. There are many ways of approaching the planning task, but moving forward requires some initial structure, a thoughtful and well-considered set of processes, and a consistent rationale for applying them.

The schedule seems daunting, demanding more time than is necessary to write a plan, because it is designed not to simply write a plan, but to allow everyone to engage in the process of planning.

The framework is large and relatively complex. Most people won't want to read it end to end. Some will say that it is too detailed, and more than is necessary for an organization of LifeRing's size and complexity. But again, the framework is designed to meet people's needs, not a mechanistic goal.

The detailed framework was developed to simplify. All of the potential actions contained in the initial long framework have been presented as ideas somewhere in LifeRing's archives, buried deep in complex digital records. Those ideas exist, and they are a part of LifeRing's existing plan, but they aren't easily accessible and they are not organized. Bringing all the ideas into one document and organizing them appears complicated, but is truly much simpler than the alternative of leaving them dispersed.

People will look for those elements of a plan which interest them particularly, and they'll have questions about specifics and background. In culling to reduce complexity, it's impossible to please everyone, or to predict which specifics or background information will be called for. When detail or background exists, it is preferable to make it available and accessible for anyone who asks, while maintaining simplified and easy-to-navigate documentation for those who desire a broad overview.

It's inevitable that someone will mention that many nonprofit organizations conduct planning activities in an annual weekend retreat by the board of directors. Why can't we do that? The answer is that most of the real work of such planning ventures – if it happens at all -- is conducted by staff following the retreat. Planning by a small group discourages collaboration and reduces motivation outside the group. Shortening the length of the planning process limits the level of detail, consistency, and development of potential alternatives. And by deferring responsibility for the bulk of the planning work, the board reduces its own authority to make critical decisions.

Even for organizations that are tasked only with strategic planning for a single year, the plans which result from brief interventions are rarely effective. Research shows that more than 50% fail to be implemented at all, primarily because they are neither comprehensive nor consistent and therefore are not good decision-making tools.

Detailed planning does take time, and it takes time away from programs and projects that may be far more interesting and immediately demanding. And detail is what makes a plan live and breathe: it does little good to set the objective that LifeRing will hold an exciting annual meeting, and then ask that our Executive Director recreate the task list from scratch every year. People will point to planning as flawed.

The greatest tension in planning is between today's needs and the future needs of the organization. By resolving to plan, LifeRing makes the commitment to assign scarce resources to planning which might be used to more effective immediate purpose. But by resolving to plan, LifeRing also demonstrates a commitment to using resources wisely for the long term, and that commitment can eventually create much greater capacity to serve immediate needs.

In this planning rationale, LifeRing makes firm decisions about the structure, method, and process of planning, and moves ahead with a collaborative planning process to involve the entire organization.

OVERVIEW

2011 YEAR OF PLANNING

The LifeRing Board of Directors is committed to a year of planning for the future of our organization, starting June 1, 2011 and ending in May 2012.

The year begins with the appointment of a planning coordinator, adoption of an interim planning framework, and agreement on a planning rationale.

PLANNING COORDINATOR

The planning coordinator is tasked to conduct planning activities, to insure opportunities for involvement by leaders, volunteers, and members throughout the organization, and to document both the results achieved through consensus and those issues that require further decision-making by leadership.

INTERIM PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The interim planning framework is detailed in a separate document. It is merely a temporary skeleton for supporting the long-range goals and objectives that will develop over the coming year. We recognize that there are many ways of approaching the planning task, but that moving forward requires some initial structure, intended to guide the development of a plan, but not to govern it.

The proposed schedule for planning activities is adaptable, but should remain relatively stable to provide predictable benchmarks for the planning process. Multiple opportunities for involvement are scheduled in order to present individuals with many chances to contribute, and to overcome the difficulties of bringing together all the key people at a specific time in a particular communications channel. No one individual is expected to participate in all of the planning activities, but systems will be provided to document and publicize progress and receive feedback as the plan evolves.

PLANNING RATIONALE

This document contains references to the theories, models, and decisions that will guide the planning process. Where possible, processes were selected that stress positive progress rather than problem solving. Systems theory and processes based in appreciative inquiry and dialogue are the guiding models.

GOALS FOR THE YEAR

The goals of the planning process will be to:

- Clarify, focus, and research LifeRing's development and prospects.
- Establish a comprehensive, logical and adaptable framework to organize LifeRing's future activities and efforts effectively.
- Involve people throughout the organization in the planning process to capture ideas, encourage innovation, and motivate volunteerism.
- Thoughtfully consider the values, beliefs, vision, mission, initiatives, goals, and objectives of the organization from the perspectives of LifeRing's diverse membership.
- Establish an informed understanding about the degree of consensus that exists relative to these organizational foundations, shining light on unstated assumptions and resolving ambiguity.
- Document and organize current organizational activities and operations and detail prospective activities and operations.
- Offer benchmarks against which to measure and review LifeRing's performance and situation.
- Increase the knowledge, skills and abilities of LifeRing's leadership, staff, and volunteers.
- Present a formal long range plan to be considered at LifeRing's 2012 Annual Meeting.
- Provide leaders with effective tools for identifying emerging and priority issues and creating the strategies and policies to address them.
- Prepare for the future, anticipate and manage change.
- Enhance LifeRing's efforts and maximize the effective use of our resources.

MANAGEMENT

TENSIONS IN PLANNING

Organizations are systems which exist within larger social and economic systems, and each part of the system affects other parts. Because of this interplay of system forces, the work of the organizations often involves “wicked choices” which require people to optimize both ends of a polarized continuum.

These polarities create tension in the organization. People are “right” to value either end of each continuum, but both sides being right doesn’t make it any easier to find the most effective middle ground. Tensions can often become conflicts, and people can become fixed on being right without being able to see that others are right too. It’s not effective to try to seek consensus decisions about these polarities on a case by case basis without a structure and process.

POLARITIES

Today’s Needs 	 Future Needs
Method 	 Process
Focused 	 Comprehensive
Simple 	 Detailed
Directive 	 Collaborative
Predictable 	 Adaptable
Elaborating from Goals 	 Organizing from Actions
Qualitative 	 Quantitative
Rational 	 Emotional
Private 	 Public
Security 	 Flexibility
Organizational Direction 	 Self-Determination
Substitutability 	 Identity
Consensus 	 Diversity
Planning Expertise 	 Organizational Experience

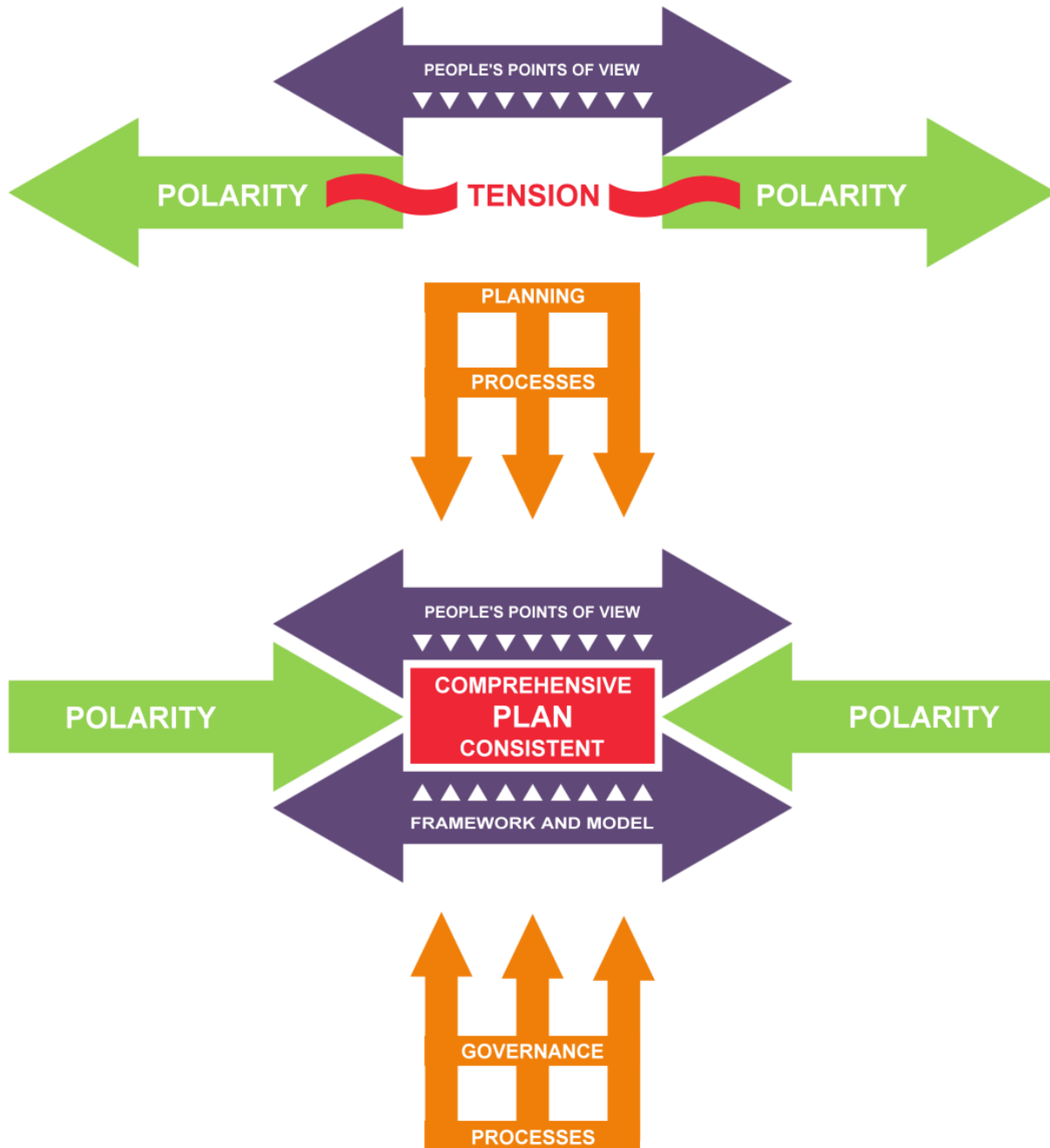
That’s where planning comes in. Planning processes take the tensions created by these polarities and uses them to create a comprehensive and consistent decision-making process. The ideas, insights, and diverse points of view of organizational members ensure that the plan is comprehensive. The structure and process of planning ensures consistency.

Imagine the challenges which must be overcome when an organization whose members hold a variety of opposing but strongly-held opinions aspires to use a collaborative process to achieve consensus around a consistent plan. The majority of the planning may come together nicely with little wasted effort, but the remainder – reflecting strongly held opposing opinions about what to do next and how to do it – will bog down the planning process unless structures and processes are in place to carefully guide planning decisions.

PLANNING DECISIONS

By “planning decisions” we mean the guidelines – framework, rationale, and selected tools – which are adopted at the beginning of the planning process, and also the day to day decisions about how to manage people within those guidelines. Planning decisions affect the organization’s direction, strategy, and choice of actions only within the narrow confines of how to plan. The result of good planning decisions will be a consistent, comprehensive plan and somewhat satisfied people. The result of poor planning decisions will be an inconsistent and incomplete plan and very dissatisfied people.

Planning turns polarities around and directs them at the plan, where they can be understood holistically as opposite but mutually valid forces. Differing tensions may come into play at different stages in the planning process. The primary role of the planning coordinator is to resolve these tensions as they arise.

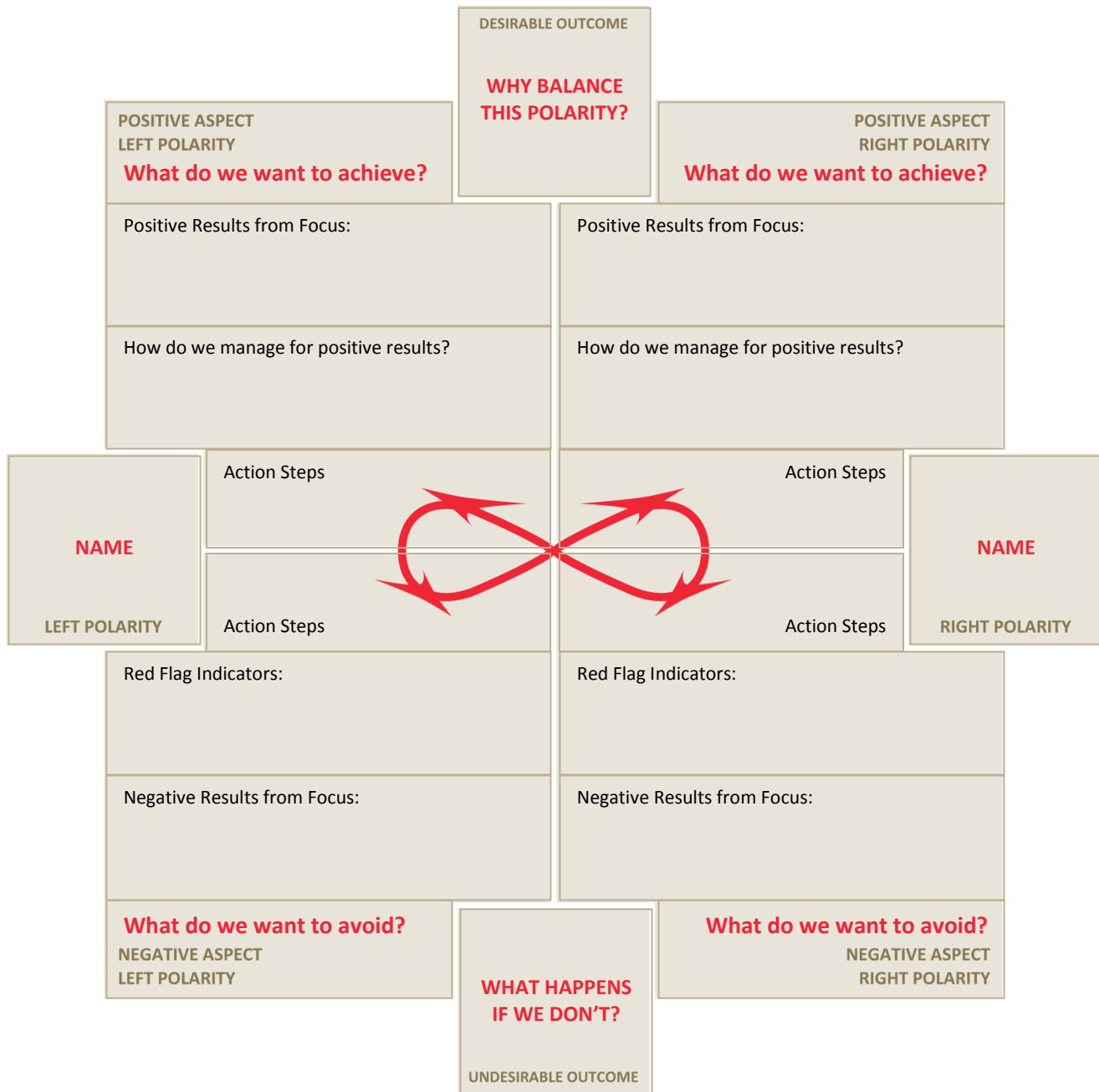


MANAGING TENSIONS: BALANCING POLARITY

Polarities have two or more right answers that are interdependent. They can be recognized when these four conditions prevail:

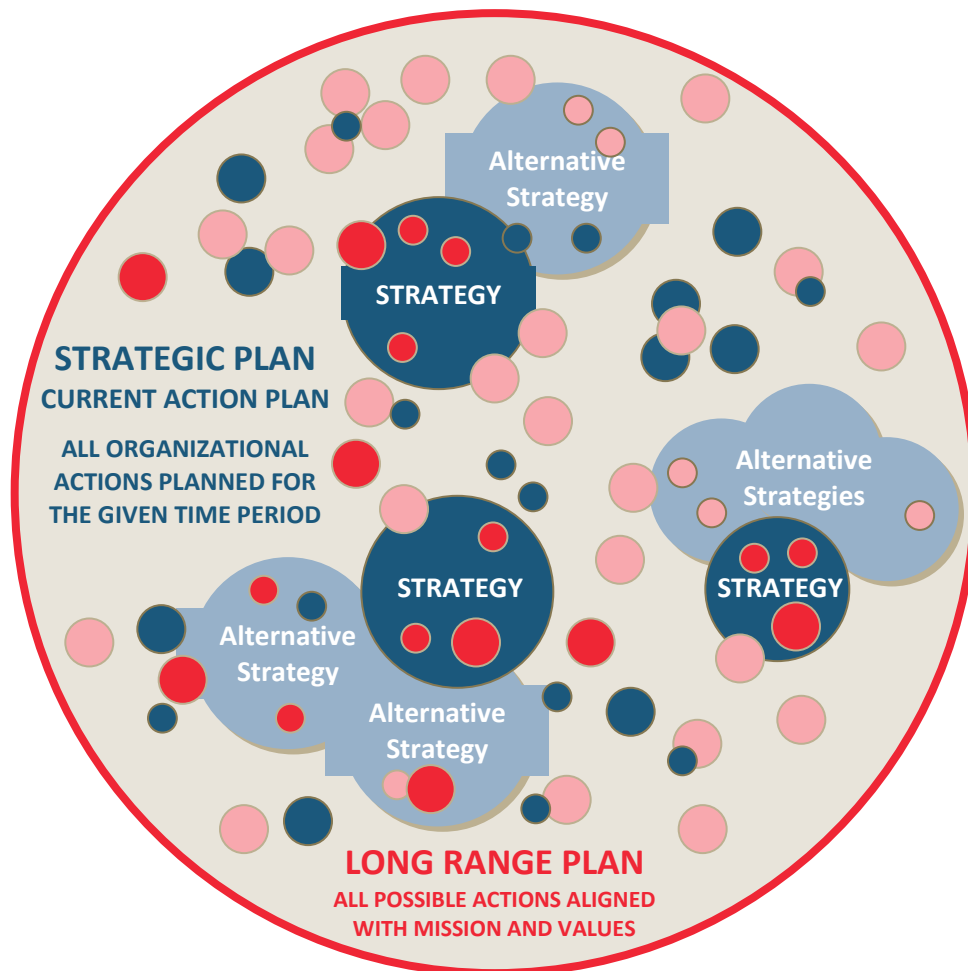
- When a tension or conflict seems intractable or recurring.
- When efforts at solution seem to result in more problems.
- When both sides of an issue are critical for long-term success.
- When people find it difficult to recognize the importance of other points of view.

The basic principles for balancing and managing polarities, including uses for the following Polarity Balancing tool, are outlined in Polarity Management: A Summary Introduction, by Barry Johnson Ph. D. , (September, 1998, Polarity Management Associates).



DEFINITIONS

The following definitions will ensure some level of shared meaning as LifeRing begins the planning process. Usage varies significantly among planners, and so it helps to simply define what we mean within the context of our own planning framework rather than get caught up in semantic disagreements. These definitions aren't necessarily "right", but they comprise a consistent working terminology that we can employ effectively.



TYPES OF PLANNING

Long Range Planning | Long range planning defines the core values, beliefs, knowledge, vision, and mission of the organization. It further details the possible set of actions the organization might take to further the mission. Long range planning organizes actions beneath goals, initiatives and objectives that may be pursued in order to effect change in the situation, as evidenced by metrics and indicators. Long range planning also details the sets of possible alternative strategies that the organization might employ to further its goals and achieve objectives. Long range planning does not decide what the organization will do or how it will act except to the extent that the plan excludes actions which are clearly not aligned with the core values, beliefs, knowledge, vision, and mission of the organization. Alignment decisions are part of governance, are decided by the final adoption of the plan, and may be determined between planning efforts through consensus or by setting policy.

Scenario Planning | Scenario planning is designed to help organizations plan for a future in which many key variables are essentially beyond their control. Scenario planning generates a series of different possible futures, and then tests the organization's role, program, and capacity under each of the possible futures.

Strategic Planning | Strategic planning determines which of an organization's many possible strategies and actions will operate in a given period. In the strategic planning process, leadership governs and exerts control by explicitly determining which opportunities will be pursued and where resources will be allocated. In selecting strategies, decision-makers de-select alternative strategies. The alternatives, however, remain part of the long-range plan as options for future deployment. While strategic plans often focus on the major choices an organization makes in a given time period, strategic plans actually encompass all of the choices for action during that period, large and small.

Tactical Planning | Tactical Planning is the process of taking the strategic plan and breaking it down into specific, short term actions and work plans. Some flexibility is required in order to respond to unforeseen events. Within an effective strategic plan, tactical planning replaces ad hoc planning as the organization reacts to change.

Ad Hoc Planning | Ad hoc planning is decision-making which occurs outside an established planning process, as a reaction to a rapidly changing situation, unexpected opportunities, or because no adequate formal planning process exists.

PLANNING FOUNDATIONS

Knowledge | Knowledge is the factual information which the organization has decided to be true. For planning purposes, knowledge serves to define and measure the situation within which the organization operates, and to allow for evidence-based evaluation of the success of organizational activities.

Core Values | Core values describe what LifeRing stands for and believes in the most fundamental sense. They are formally agreed to be shared, significant, and essential to defining the continuing purpose of the organization. Core values inform both the mission and the vision and are indispensable to planning.

Core Beliefs | Core beliefs also describe what LifeRing stands for and believes in, and are formally agreed to be shared and significant. Unlike core values, core beliefs may change slowly over time, and may not be essential to defining the continuing purpose of the organization. Core disbeliefs are generally reworded as beliefs. Core beliefs are useful in developing strategies which reflect organizational culture, and in understanding the organization's members.

Agreements to Disagree | When values or beliefs are strongly held within the organization but are countered by other strongly held values and beliefs, the organization can either decide to take a stand about the difference and create a new value, or it can acknowledge the diversity of opinion by formally agreeing to disagree, withholding judgment for the long term. Such acknowledgement assists planning efforts by reducing polarization and avoiding repetitive conflict. Often, agreements to disagree become organizational assets because they cause the organization to provide program choices and options which reflect human diversity and differing needs.

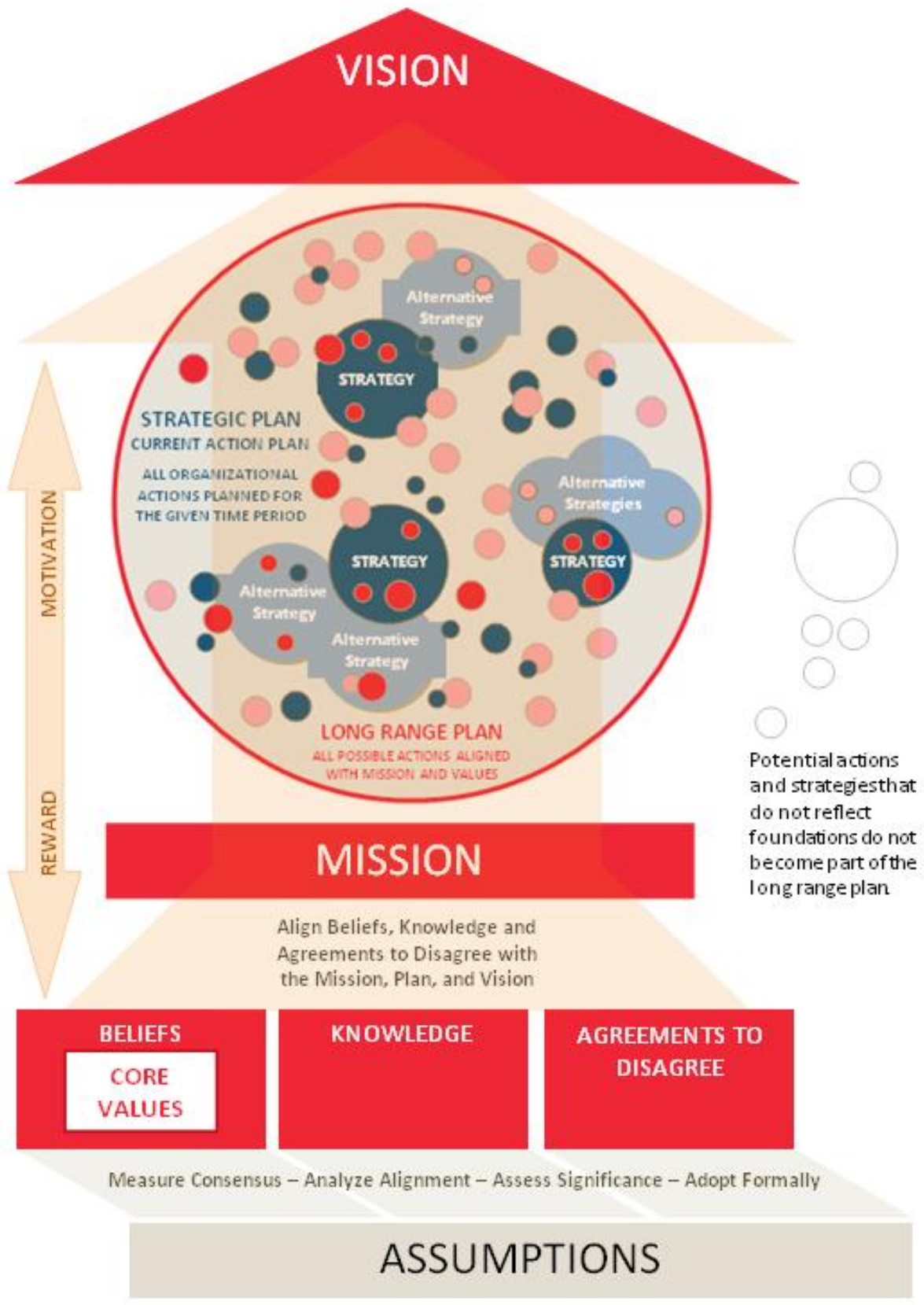
Assumptions | Assumptions are those facts and beliefs that individuals in the organization may hold to be true, but which have not been established as either truthful or shared by others in the organization. Once acknowledged, these assumptions may be assessed as agreed upon or not, and then assigned as knowledge, core values, beliefs, or agreements to disagree. A significant part of establishing an organization's foundation is to deliberately reduce the level of assumption.

Mission | The mission states the purpose of LifeRing's existence today, keeps people focused on purpose, and discourages activities which do not further central goals. The mission statement emerges from core values and should be enduring, lasting for the lifetime of the organization, with small adjustments along the way to make it congruent with a changing vision. In rapidly changing situations, mission statements say why the organization does its work, rather than how, since this better distinguishes the human experience and process of the organization, rather than its products.

Vision | The vision is an image or description of the organization LifeRing aspires to be. If you could create the best organization you can possibly imagine, and have the effect you most desire, how would you describe this situation? Vision statements result when the mission statement is fully informed by core values and elaborated by bold goals. Vision statements build community, inspire action and get everyone working together toward the same outcome. Vision statements help organizations soar.

Alignment | Effective alignment between beliefs, knowledge, goals, mission, and vision ensures that the organization's people (who share the values and beliefs) will be motivated to carry out the organization's mission. Alignment guards against potential costly mistakes, particularly where the end does not justify the means, and long term credibility may be damaged. The process of aligning foundations with aspirations is yet another force toward consistency in planning and action. And alignment encourages innovation and enhances forecasting by immersing specific objectives in human meaning.

Motivation and Reward | Core values and beliefs motivate people to support the work of the organization. Evidence of the efficacy of shared beliefs is rewarding to staff and volunteers when the organization performs effectively. Shared knowledge is also a significant contributor to organizational performance and participant satisfaction. All foundations provide a sense of belonging that is central to effective organizing.



GOALS, OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES AND INITIATIVES

Goal | A goal is one of several broad qualitative statements of what the organization hopes to achieve. A goal is broad and general, the solving of the problem that has been identified. A goal can never be achieved because it is not specific, finite, concrete or verifiable. Long-term goals are quite stable, describing the outcomes which, together, create the envisioned situation. Clear goals are further defined by measurable objectives. Goals supported by initiatives that have measurable objectives become self-fulfilling. Strategic plans with five to seven over-arching short-term goals to be achieved within three to five years are the most efficient to manage.

Specific Objectives | Specific objectives are the measurable statements of what will be done to achieve its vision. Specific objectives relate directly to the quantifiable portion of desired outcomes. The best objectives are SMART – specific, measurable, agreed upon, reasonable, and time-limited.

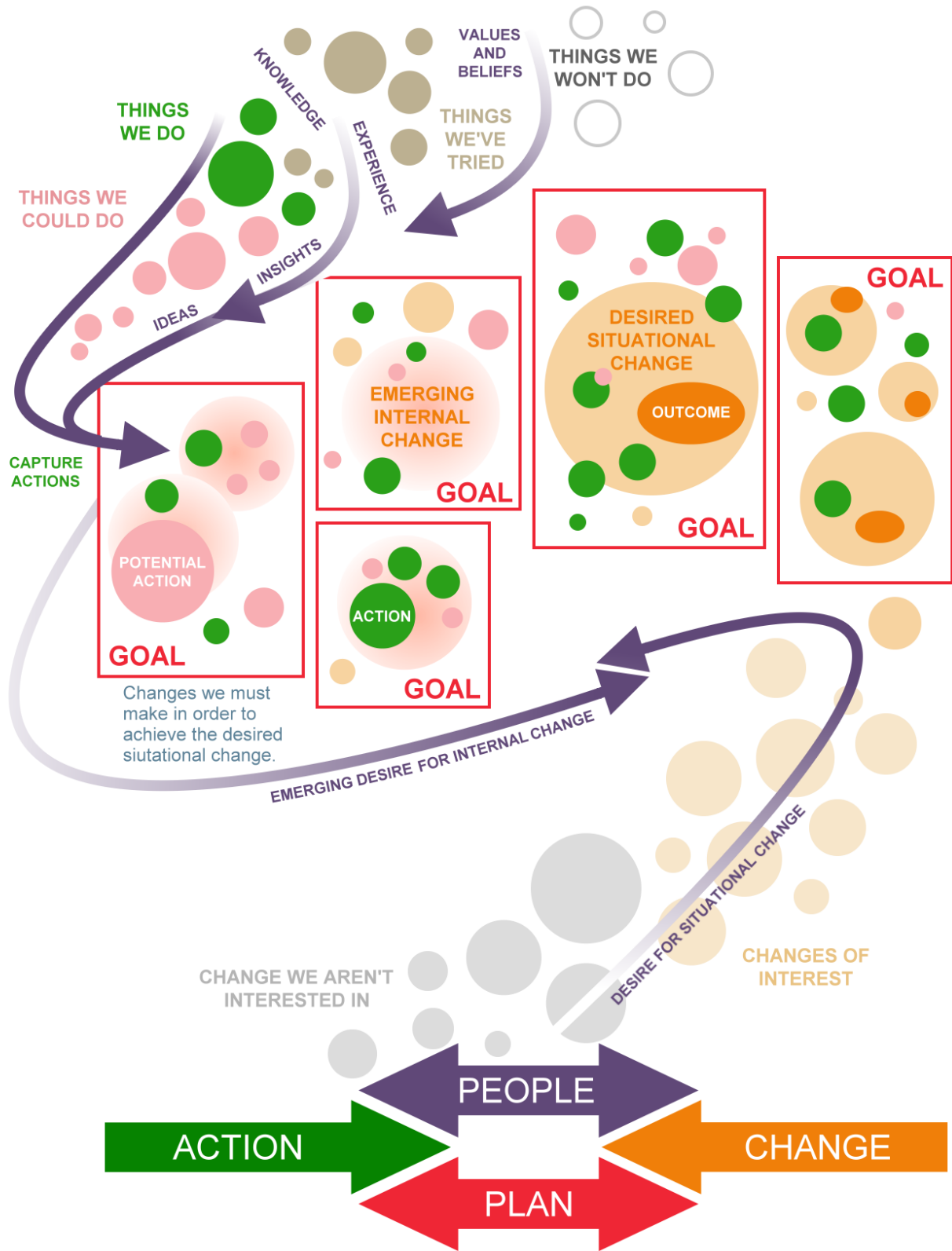
Global Objectives | Global objectives are broad categories which reflect all the possible actions an organization might take in order to further its goals. Global objectives are derived from the goals, breaking those broad statements of purpose down into meaningful categories which summarize sets of possible actions. As such, they are somewhat functional, cross-referenced to produce comprehensive strategies. Global objectives are often procedural: they encompass the steps which must be taken in order to obtain a desired outcome. Global objectives may or may not be quantifiable. They provide a framework: linking tactics to strategies to scenarios to outcomes for decision-making, and actions to work plans to specific objectives to the vision for operations.

Initiatives | Initiatives subcategorize the objectives which must be accomplished in order to further a general goal. Organizing via initiatives offers a layer of functional specificity between goals and global objectives. Initiatives help keep the organization's eye on the vision, on the desired outcomes and the plan for getting there, so that people do not become so focused on specific functions or activities that they lose sight of the relative contribution of various organizational functions to the desired outcome.

Outcomes | Outcomes are real changes in the physical or social situation or in individuals. For service organizations, outcomes are often changes in attitude, knowledge, behavior or skills in a person or in a group of people. Part of planning is to select those outcomes which are meaningful to the organization, and to measure and focus attention on these particular outcomes while ignoring others. One of the advantages of a systems approach to planning is the requirement to ask what effect any change will have upon all the other elements of the system, shining light on outcomes which may be meaningful and would otherwise have been ignored.

Evidence-Based Outcomes | All outcomes are measurable, but capturing the full breadth and depth of change is a daunting and costly task. It is expected – and honest -- for an organization to assess progress as though the only outcomes that can be fully trusted are those outcomes which are quantifiable. But it is important to remember that the value of an outcome is not always proportional to the ease of measuring it. Allocation of scarce organizational resources to evaluation inevitably creates conflict. The way around this dilemma is to evaluate outcomes so effectively that people are willing to invest new resources in those proven programs.

The framework for setting goals can seem mechanistic, but the process from which goals emerge is quite organic. The process of defining objectives is similar, further organizing potential actions to accomplish desired change, given people's participation in the planning process.



STRATEGIES, SCENARIOS, AND TACTICS

Strategies | Strategies are statements of major approach or method of furthering goals, achieving outcomes, and pursuing vision. Strategies begin to answer the question “How?” As such, strategies reflect decisions about how best to proceed when alternative methods also exist. A given strategy cannot exist without one or more alternatives, and cannot be understood without comparative analysis and definition. Initially, strategies describe a general approach or method rather than specific activities, programs or projects. Once a strategic choice is made, a strategy is enhanced through tactical, program and project planning, and specified through actions, procedures and work plans. Strategies may span goals and objectives, taking in certain portions of a plan without respect to other portions.

Scenarios | Scenarios are sets of strategies or tactics that must be taken together in order to function effectively in a given situation. Scenarios enable adaptive decision-making at the strategic level. They reflect cause and effect: If this happens, we will do this. If that happens, we will do that.

Tactics | Tactics describe choices for specific actions that will advance a strategy. Like strategies, tactics are also decisions about how to act, but they are more specific. Tactical decisions are often driven by strategies, but need not be. Tactics delineate who will take each action by when, how resources will be expended, and how the effect of that action will be measured.

DESCRIBING ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Actions | Actions or tasks are the most discrete things that people do to further an organization's goals. They are well-defined and cannot be detailed more accurately without resorting to procedure.

Work Plans | Work plans are sets of actions that describe the work of a specific program, project, plan or activity, or the work of a team or committee, or individual job or position. Work plans may come and go, span several goals, and whole sections of a work plan may overlap with sections of another. Individuals, committees or teams take authority for work plans and are responsible for their advancement.

Activities | Activities are general, common-sense sets of actions that further organizational goals or are required in order to conduct operations. Activities tend to be summarized functionally and are useful for describing functions that span or bridge organizational goals and objectives. Activities are seldom formally adopted, but make up the bulk of the day to day operational work of the organization.

Programs | Programs are sets of actions which are well-defined and formally adopted. Programs may serve to carry out the mission of the organization or merely support it. Programs deliver products, services, information and communications. While programs may fall primarily under a particular initiative, they may also span goals and initiatives. Programs tend to be long-term, as contrasted with projects which have a definite end date.

Projects | Projects are sets of actions which are well-defined and formally adopted. Projects may serve to carry out the mission of the organization or merely support it. Projects create products, design services, and establish processes for delivering information and communications. Projects may also deliver products, services, information and communications that are intended to meet a short-term need with a definite end date. While projects may fall primarily under a particular initiative, they may also span goals and initiatives. Projects tend to be short-term, with a definite end date, as contrasted with programs which are ongoing.

Models | Models are projects or programs which are intended to be used as examples. A program may be modified to work in a different geographic location, or a different demographic group, but the model is intended to save the resources that would be required to completely reinvent the program or project in each new setting. Model programs or projects may be one of several alternative models, to be selected for a purpose similar to selection of a strategy. The term does not imply that a model is preferable to any other program; simply that it has been designed to be copied.

Templates | One step beyond a model, the template for a model program provides documentation and guidance for recreating the project or program.

Pilots | A pilot program is a test to see whether a program or project will work. Pilots are tentative models for future development. Pilots are carefully designed efforts to improve performance, developed after an initial period of study and planning. A pilot program is installed for a predetermined period, and then evaluated and refined before moving into full implementation.

EVALUATION ELEMENTS

Indicators | Indicators are characteristics that indicate a quality or state in a system. Indicators may measure the achievement of vision in the global situation or environment within which the organization operates. Indicators may also measure achievement of vision within the organization itself. Indicators are standards: an agreed upon set of measures that communicate progress toward changing a situation in a fairly global sense. Whenever possible, organizational indicators should accurately mirror larger situational indicators which measure progress toward a societal goal to which the organization contributes.

Scalar | A single number derived by aggregation from two or more values. When scalars or indexes are used to aggregate indicator data, the results are simplified, but distorted.

Vector | A number of indicators presented simultaneously to give a profile of conditions. When vectors are used to aggregate indicator data, the results are complex, but more complete than a vector.

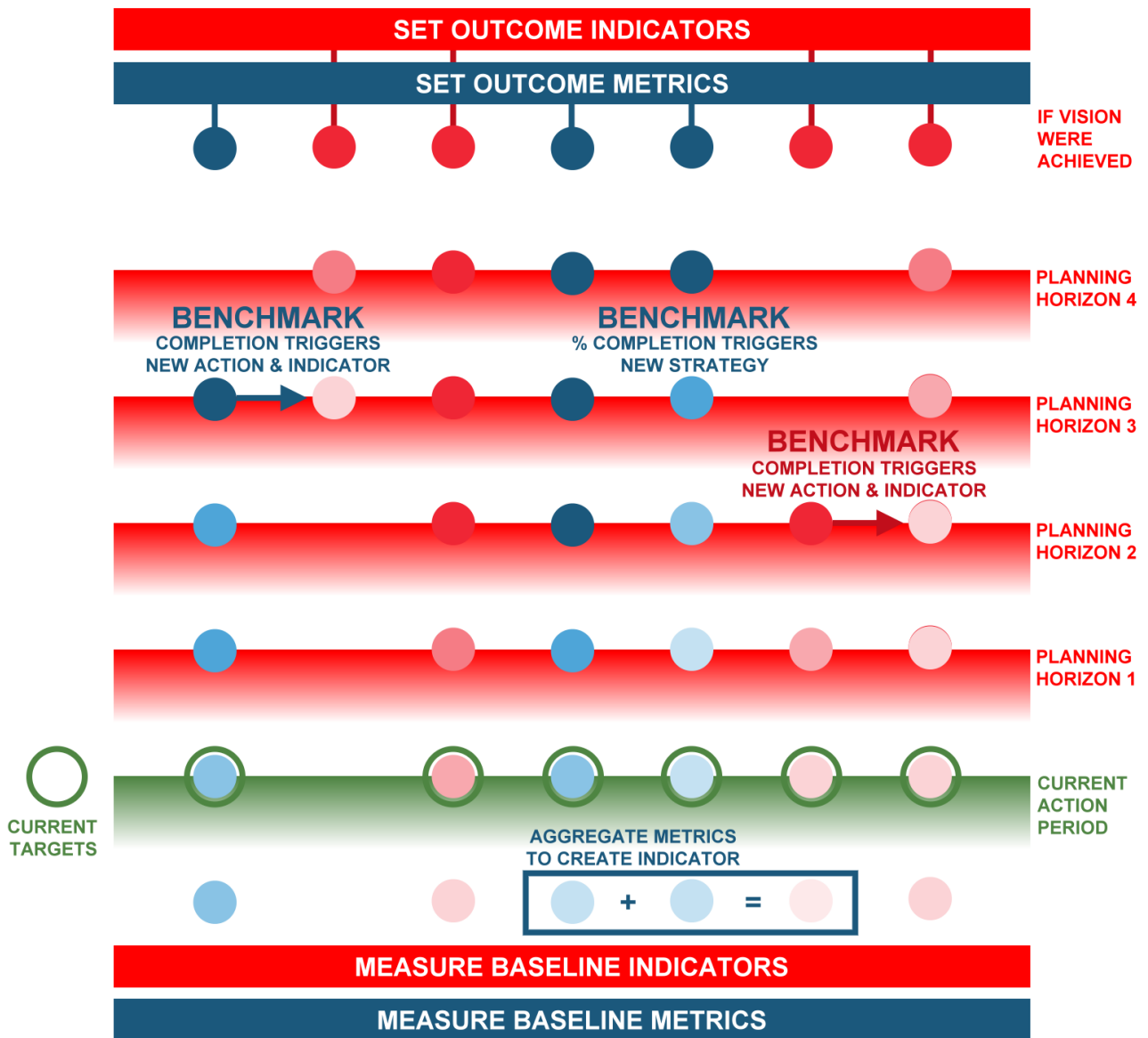
Metric | Metrics are quantitative measures that may or may not indicate change in a targeted system. Metrics measure organizational action and demonstrate performance. Metrics also measure changes in the situation, that, when taken together, become indicators. Metrics measure whether we have done what we said we would do, in terms of planned action, while indicators measure whether those actions have resulted in substantive organizational or situational change.

Measure | A measure is a value that is quantified against a metric at a point in time.

Baseline | A baseline establishes the point from which measurements can be made, and provides accountability. Baseline measurements and analyses allow the organization to demonstrate that progress has been made in fact, rather than just in perception.

Target | A target metric or indicator is the outcome point the organization is attempting to achieve during the current strategic plan. It may be the whole of a stated specific objective, or a point on the way to achieving that specific objective. A target is set to track the progress of an initiative or a work plan toward the specific objective. Performance measures the degree to which the organization's efforts exceeded or fell short of the target. As targeting improves over time, so does the ability of the organization to forecast performance, and predict the relative value of resource allocation strategies.

Benchmarks | A benchmark serves as one of several reference points between the current situation and the stated objective. Benchmarks may be equivalent to several stacked metric or indicator targets for a particular specific objective. Benchmarks may also be set for the completion of an action or set of actions upon which other actions depend. Benchmarks are set to track the progress of an initiative or a work plan, and are also valuable indicators of situational changes which may necessitate organizational redirection.



ELEMENTS OF A STANDARD NONPROFIT PLAN

Planning | Organizational design, environment, and decision-making. Often referred to as “organization structure” or an “executive summary” this part of the nonprofit plan describes how the group is organized. This is where incorporation is discussed, and the wording often reflects the organization’s bylaws. The summary includes information about who makes decisions and sets the policies, mission and objectives of the organization and any subsidiaries. Finally, the summary explains how decisions are made over time through both long-range and strategic planning.

Operations | Activities required in order for minimal organizational functioning. The operations plan describes those activities of the organization which are absolutely essential in order for it to continue on a day-to-day basis. Operations include service and product delivery, inventory, facilities, equipment, and maintenance. Management of the computerized information required for essential work is detailed, including web presence, documents, and databases.

Human Resources | People who do the work of the organization. This area details who does the work of the organization, volunteers, staff and the board of directors. Key people are listed along with their expertise and experience. An organization chart is included, lines of responsibility detailed, and significant communication channels may be charted. An assessment of current and future human needs is provided.

Knowledge Resources | Organizational history, culture, and intellectual property. This aspect of nonprofit planning is often omitted, although knowledge resources are often the key factor distinguishing one organization from another. Organizational history, culture, and intellectual property maintain continuity of purpose and allow nonprofit organizations to function at high levels of excellence and productivity with relatively untrained work forces. The accessibility of knowledge resources often determines levels of achievement. This is where documentation, organization, archiving and access are detailed for all of the information the organization requires in order to thrive.

Financial Resources | Current and projected financial status. The financial plan includes an income statement, balance sheet, cash flow statement, and financial projections. Grant awards, major contributions, and in-kind support are listed. Capital structure is explained and detail is provided for outstanding loans, debts, holdings, bonds and endowments. Needs for financing are explained. Include your fundraising plan. If there are subsidiaries, detail is provided about how they relate financially to the primary organization.

Outreach | Marketing. This section of the nonprofit plan includes targeting and demographic information about the people the nonprofit is designed to serve: Constituencies, segments of constituencies, and target constituencies are discussed. Trends in the environment, the need for the nonprofit's services, and alternatives, potential partners and collaborators are explained. Detail is provided for branding, visibility, promotional efforts, market research, media, and communication channels.

Programs | Products and services to benefit target constituencies. This section describes the products and services the organization produces or distributes. Detail is provided for delivery processes and sources of products. When alternative programs are available, reasons for selecting one program or method rather than another are given.

Evaluation | Metrics to show quantifiable results. The evaluation section details the measurable benefits provided by the nonprofit organization. Detail is given about how the organization, and others, may evaluate the efficacy of programs and services. Whenever possible, reference is made to standards of practice and methods of evaluation which are recognized as reliable by outside sources. The section details evidence-based practices and performance.

LONG RANGE MODEL

FRAMEWORK FOR A LONG RANGE PLAN

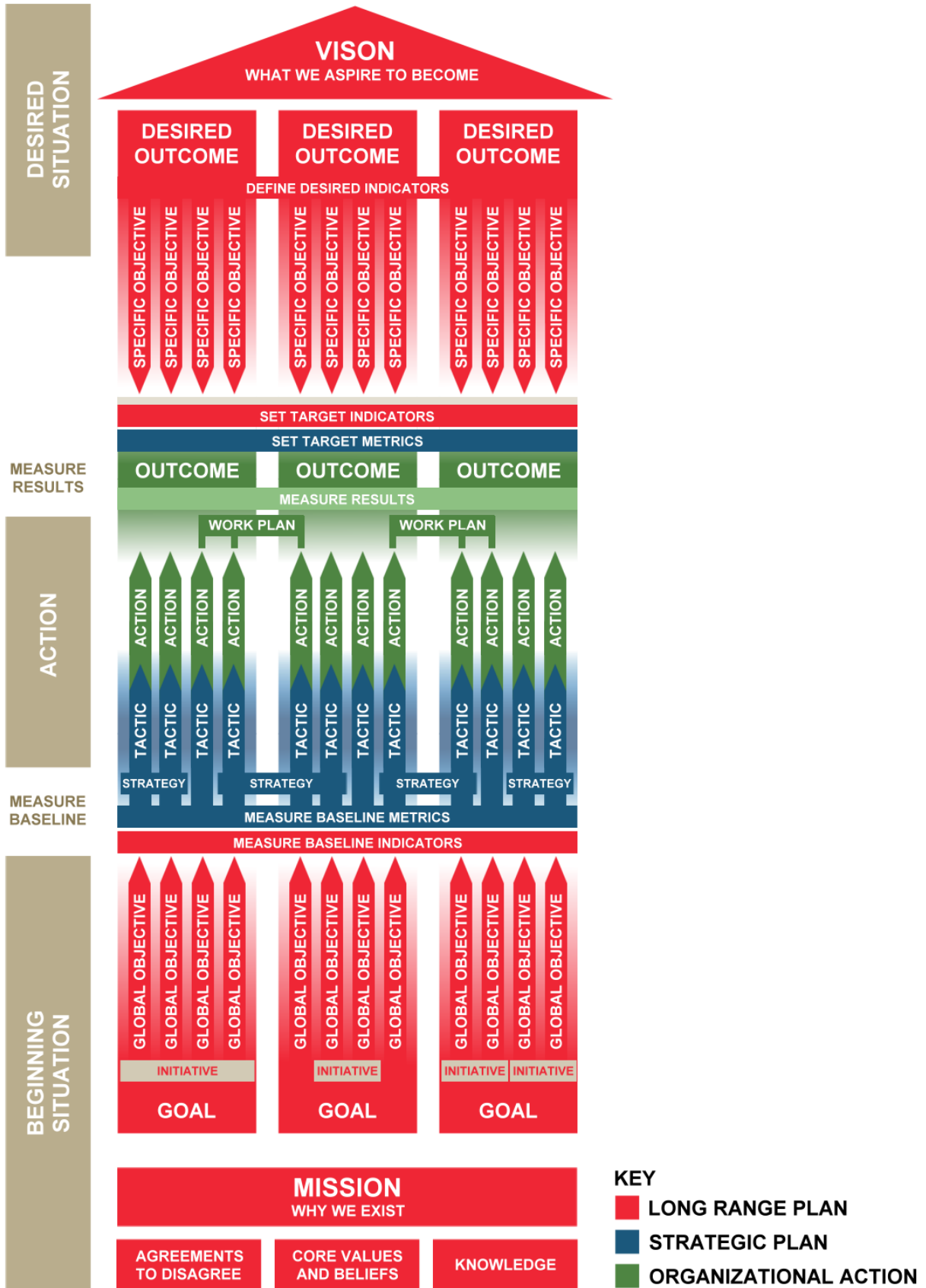
The model at right illustrates a few of the planning elements in relation to one another within the context of a situation which changes over time. This is the way that we'll structure a long-range plan using the elements we just defined. The model is helpful for conceptualizing the relationships among planning elements and discerning their intended purposes.

Read from the ground up, the planning framework is based on values, beliefs, and the mission. Goals are agreed upon and outcomes are defined in hope of realizing the organization's vision.

LEVELS OF DETAIL

It's a little difficult to conceptualize the levels of detail in a finished plan by looking at the model. Since the real world is messy, plans don't end up with neat and equivalent sets of actions in every category. To get a better idea of how plans frame out in terms of the level of detail, refer to the chart below.





STAGES IN THE LONG RANGE PLANNING PROCESS


1 | DEFINE

- Explore planning theory and select appropriate models.
- Design planning processes.
- Create planning framework.
- Set planning schedule.
- Formally adopt interim planning framework and rationale.
- Appoint planning coordinator.
- Establish communication channels, archiving and access methods.

2 | DISCOVER

- Conduct initial outreach activities.
- Collect stories, conduct interviews, create dialogue.

3 | DESIGN

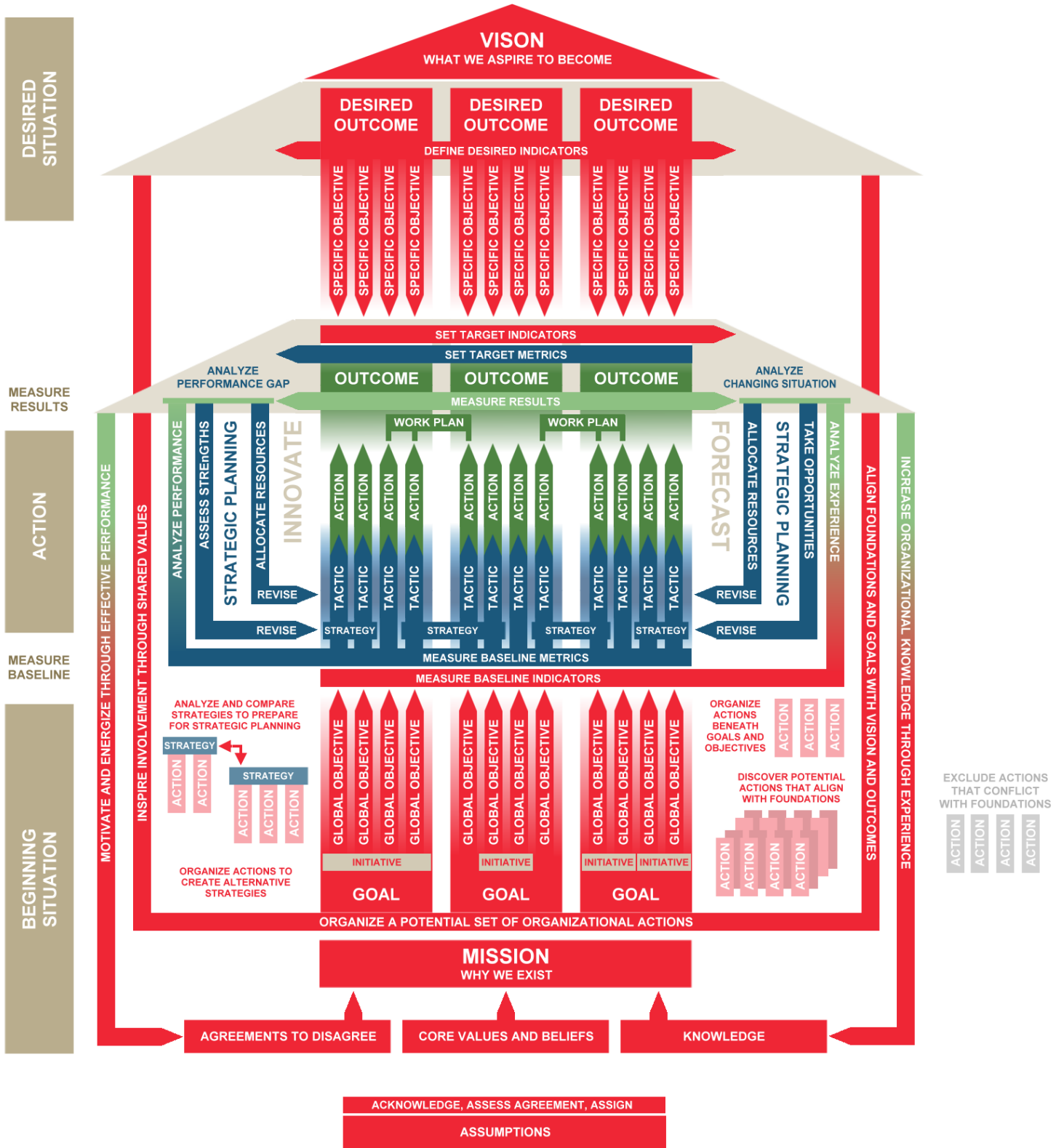
- 
- Collect potential actions from current activity, archival research, and external resources.
 - Elicit ideas and insights from members.
 - Research, refine and structure emerging ideas and insights.
 - Detail potential actions for the organization.
 - Structure actions within a consistent framework of goals and objectives.
 - Provide chances to interpret, value and negotiate knowledge from data.
 - Summarize emerging values and aspirations to serve as foundations.
 - Provide opportunities for members to participate in iterative revision.

4 | DREAM

- Examine the purpose of the organization today.
- Envision the organization's future.
- Explore alignment between emerging values and vision.
- Elaborate desired situations and forecast trends.

5 | DESTINY

- Develop and analyze alternatives.
- Develop metrics.
- Develop indicators.
- Draft alternative specific objectives.
- Create a progress dashboard.
- Explore alternative methods, processes, and points of view.
- Draft strategic and tactical alternatives for review.
- Analyze potential scenarios.
- Draft planning documents.
- Adopt final long-range plan.



STRUCTURING POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Collect Potential Actions | Collect potential actions the organization might take, at all levels of detail, from current activity, archival research, external resources, and member contributions.

Sort into Temporary Functional Categories | Sort actions beneath broad general categories of functional activity, using the standard components of nonprofit planning as an initial guide, regardless of the level of detail.

Draft Global Objectives | Using affinity diagramming, group actions that appear to share a common purpose to define interim global objectives.

Initiatives | Sort Interim Global Objectives into the Functional Categories, write a brief description of the category as an Initiative, and give the initiative a name.

Draft Goals | Group global objectives that appear to share a common purpose to define interim goals.

Draft Global Sub-Objectives | Draft sub-objectives at various levels of detail. Add new global objectives and actions that emerge from the structure.

Consider Metrics at the Action Level | Refine level of detail for sub-objectives based on metrics. Insert potential actions related to the creation and measurement of each metric.

Analyze Components of the Vision | Evaluate the situation with an eye to defining situational indicators.

Identify Situational Indicators | Locate standard situational indicators and measurement schemes.

Detail the Desired Situation | Define broad situational indicators to detail the quantitative desired situation.

Align to Desired Situational Indicators | Apply situational indicators and reconsider planning structure based on alignment.

Structure | Document a structure for the plan.

STRATEGIC MODEL



OVERVIEW OF 7-S STRATEGIC PLANNING

Success | **What does LifeRing aim to accomplish?** What does success look like? What will be the benefits of LifeRing's success? How can the benefits be measured? This portion of the strategic planning process flows directly from the long-range plan.

Space | **What makes LifeRing special?** The concept of organizational "space" derives from multi-dimensional modeling, and LifeRing's space is the sum of what differentiates it from other self-help addiction recovery organizations, and may be summarized in a positioning statement.

For a relatively new venture like LifeRing, organizational space — what need the organization will address, what it is going to offer, what will define it and make it special — should flow from the experience and knowledge of those who are most familiar with the organization.

Strengths | **What do we bring to the task?** Strengths are the experience, competencies, knowledge, assets, resources and other advantages that LifeRing and its members bring to the table. To be successful requires experience and knowledge more than just hard work, although hard work can bring experience and eventually success.

So the decision to work from strengths flows from a simple cost and benefit analysis: using the resources LifeRing already enjoys will be less costly than obtaining additional resources by purchasing experience and knowledge or working to remedy weaknesses..

The strategic planning process requires that leaders itemize and detail strengths, be realistic, and think about how strengths align with space and can bring success. Simply, how can LifeRing use its strengths to maximize the availability of LifeRing resources relative to other recovery programs within the universe of those who need recovery support?

Situation | Where are we now? Where is LifeRing heading? The "where are we" question can be answered by analyzing the resource requirements, risks and opportunities related to alternative strategies which might meet the need, current organizational performance, trends, member needs, desires and satisfaction, and more. These are the relevant markers that define the current situation.

But the situation is not static. Hence, strategic planners will refer to the forecasting elements of the long range plan. Given the predicted current trajectory of the organization, where will it be at the end of the planning horizon without planning and intervention? Where are the known markers taking the organization today? Is the variance from the target such that current actions will not yield the desired result?

Strategies | How do we get where we want to go? The "artful" part of strategic planning is developing strategies. Once you have identified the target and the situation, you can identify "the gap," between the target based on the organization succeeding and where the organization is instead going to be at the end of the planning horizon without intervention. The goal of strategic planning is to come up with a handful of powerful actions that will move the organization the requisite amount to close the gap.

Strategies must therefore be actionable, meaning the organization must be capable of achieving them within the planning horizon. Strategies must be measurable so that their development, deployment and attainment can be tracked and corrections made as needed. Strategies must be effective, meaning they must be capable of changing the trajectory of the organization. Strategies must be sufficient; meaning in their totality the strategies employed must be capable of supplying the necessary force to put the organization on target. Strategies typically attack weaknesses and issues, and capitalize on strengths and opportunities.

Each strategy adopted should focus on a specific area: developing volunteer resources, creating a comprehensive set of publications, offering a website designed to meet member needs, increasing foundation funding, increasing the number of face to face meetings, etc.

Stages | What is the plan? Having a strategy is hollow without identifying and implementing the active stages needed to attain it. For each of the handful of strategies adopted to close the strategic gap, the series of necessary actions required to attain it need to be identified and projects planned. Human resources need to be identified and made accountable. Planning needs to incorporate time frames, benchmarks, and measures for success.

Safeguards | Are we on the right track? On target? Safeguards are needed lest the activities after the planning session ends prove insufficient or inappropriate to "closing the strategic gap." One type of safeguard is the checkpoint, a predetermined time where the organization assesses progress in doing the work, implementing strategies, and achieving the desired result. At a checkpoint, corrective action can be taken if things aren't going as planned.

A related safeguard is the "go/no go" point. If the assessment of progress is not positive or is insufficient based on a predetermined metric, work can be halted permanently or until other actions are taken that enable strategic work to continue. "Go/no go" points can be set at points in time or can be based on progress in attaining related strategies.

Another safeguard can be the strategic planning dashboard, a continually changing document showing continuing progress. Dashboards are designed to reflect work plan, program and project progress, levels of strategy implementation, measurements that show the organization's situation and how it might be changing, metrics and indicators.

In addition to planning checkpoints and dashboard reporting, the planning update is a periodic session, occurring every six months, where progress on all strategies and action steps is reviewed. A situation assessment is conducted too, to be sure that the basic planning assumptions are still well founded, and to adjust plans as required.

Adapted from [7-S Strategic Planning](#) © 2007-2010 Forrest Consulting

STRATEGIC PLANNING METHODS

For strategic planning, our intention is to adapt the methods discussed by Colin Thunhurst and Carol Barker in their article “ Using problem structuring methods in strategic planning” published in Health Policy and Planning, 1999.

Strategic planning will be developed on a five year rolling cycle following an initial comprehensive strategic planning effort in 2012-2013.

	STAGES IN THE PLANNING SPIRAL	OBJECTIVE	TECHNIQUE
BROAD STRATEGY	Strategic situational analysis.	To define broad areas of opportunity for the organization to further goals.	Problem Tree
	Priority and objective setting at the strategic level.	To identify alternative selected responses to broad opportunities.	Convert Problem Tree into Hierarchy of Objectives
	Appraisal of alternatives at the strategic level.	1 Explore inter-relationship between broad opportunities.	1 Mapping
		2 Select between alternatives (⇒ strategy areas)	2 Ranking Methods
DETAILED STRATEGY	Priority and objective setting.	To identify alternatives within prioritized strategy areas and identify potential response.	Detailed Problem Tree Hierarchy of Objectives
	Appraisal of alternatives at the operational level.	1 To explore inter-relationship between alternatives within strategy areas	1 Mapping
		2 To choose between alternatives within prioritized strategy areas (⇒ tactical response)	2 Ranking Methods

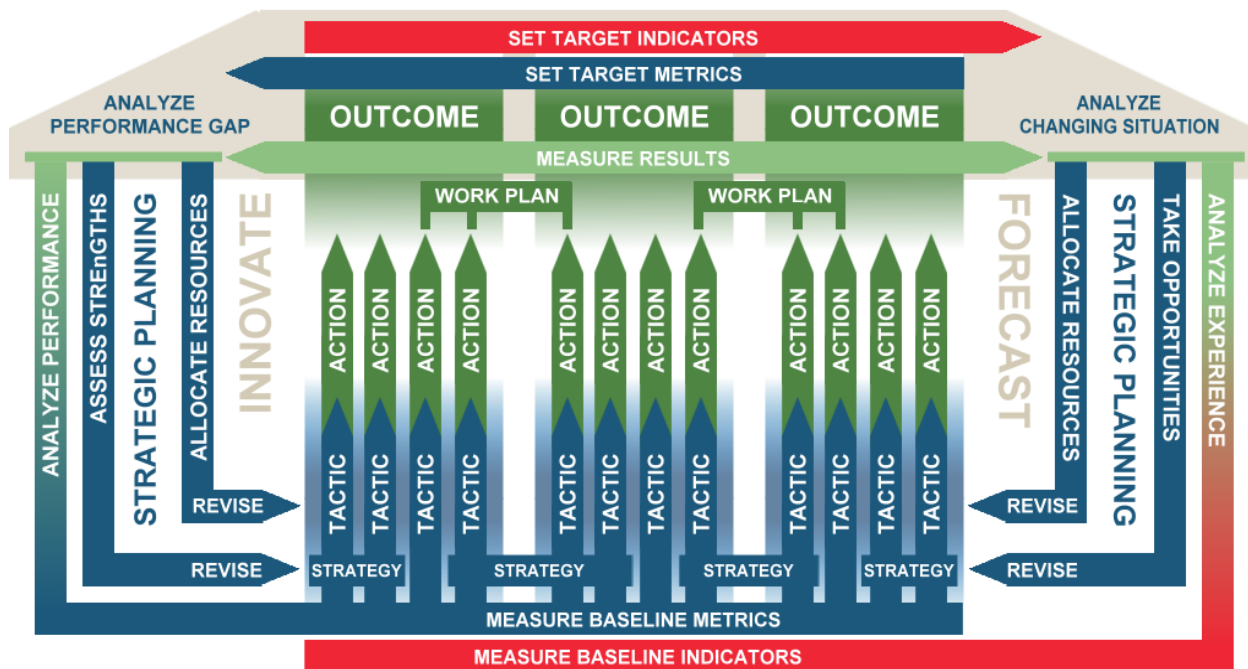
Adapted from: COLIN THUNHURST1 AND CAROL BARKER. Using problem structuring methods in strategic planning. HEALTH POLICY AND PLANNING; 14(2): 127–134 © Oxford University Press 1999

ANALYZING PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE

Results Analysis | Results analysis assesses the degree to which the organization has furthered its goals and achieved desired outcomes as measured by agreed-upon performance metrics and situational indicators. Results analysis is the comprehensive evidence-based quantitative evaluation of an organization’s progress.

Performance Analysis | Performance analysis allows the organization to compare actual performance with potential performance. It involves quantifying, documenting and analyzing the “gap” or variance between the organization’s desire to achieve outcomes, and current capabilities to achieve outcomes. This helps provide the organization with insight into the best allocation and integration of its resources, strategies and tactics which could be improved, and innovations which might be adopted.

Situation Analysis | Situation analysis begins with a scan of the organization’s environment, including potential members, partners, alternative organizations or services, and many other aspects of the organization’s context. Environment will include the political and regulatory context, economics, social and cultural context, the context of treatment and practice, and technology. Once the organization’s current situation has been defined, the situation analysis is expanded to forecast trends in the organization and its environment. The organization may then develop adaptive strategies to further its goals within the context of a changing situation.



ASSESSING CAPACITY

This tool, developed by the World Bank, provides a good basis for "diagnosing institutional capability for implementing and sustaining a policy". The toolkit provides a structured approach for asking questions, analyzing results and identifying critical institutional issues. "

Steps in the process:

- Identify the objectives of the policy, program or project.
- Identify the outcomes required to meet the objectives.
- Work back from outcomes to identify actions that will be required, who must accomplish them, and institutions that will influence the actors (particularly where these are likely to result in outcomes significantly different from what you expect).
- Identify institutions that that have to be addressed to meet the policy, program or project objectives. These are the "critical to success" institutions.
- Collect data from relevant sources, including key local stakeholders, informed observers, relevant documentation and past experience.
- Compile information in the logical framework shown below.
- Ask the key questions shown on the following page.

Objectives	Required Outcomes	Required Actions	Required Actors	Incentives for Actors to Take/Not to Take Required Actions		Critical to Success Incentives
				Plus	Minus	
Objective 1	Outcome 1	Action 1	Actor X	Positive Incentive for Actor X to do Action 1	Negative Incentive for Actor X to do Action 1	Critical to Success Incentives for Actor X to do Action 1
			Actor Y			
		Action 2				
	Outcome 2					
Objective 2						

Reference: Adapted from Berryman S. (1997). "Guidelines for Assessing Institutional Capacity, November 17, World Bank.

Assessment Area	Key Questions
-----------------	---------------

<p>1. The Outcomes: What has to occur for the problem addressed by the policy, program or project to be solved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are the specific outcomes that would constitute policy, program or project success? ■ How will beneficiaries have to behave - or which of their behaviors will have to change - for the policy, program or project to succeed?
<p>2. Implementation Actions and Actors: What critical actions have to be taken to secure the outcomes, and by whom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What key actions do the different stakeholders (including beneficiaries) have to take to realize the desired outcomes? (both at policy making and implementation stage) ■ What critical actions do the state have to take to realize the desired outcomes, and who has to take them? This refers to all relevant government actors from politicians to front-line service providers
<p>3. What are the formal and informal institutions that condition whether and how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ players who control the resources and permissions required to take critical actions make them available ■ players responsible for taking critical actions try to obtain resources they need and deploy those they get 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In practice, what incentives affect the players who control the resources required for a critical action?

Adapted from Berryman S. (1997). "Guidelines for Assessing Institutional Capacity, November 17, World Bank.

Section Adapted from: Promoting Institutional & Organisational Appraisal & Development

TESTING THE PLAN

MULTIPLE TESTS FOR ADEQUACY

To test the final long range plan for adequacy, the primary tools will be the five tools listed in the inset at left, and the checklist provided in *Promoting Institutional & Organisational Appraisal & Development*, for the Open Systems Model. In addition, the following questions will guide development of the plan:

- Does the framework include each major aspect of the organization?
- Does the plan clearly specify mission, vision, values and beliefs?
- Does the plan provide processes for integrating and assimilating information?
- Does the plan provide a big picture perspective on decisions, situations and events?
- Does the plan create understanding of interrelationships?
- Does the plan reflect causal relationships?
- Does the plan identify common elements or trends in situations and actions?
- Does the plan create awareness of multiple effects of any action?
- Is the plan focused on desired outcomes?
- Is each specific outcome a desirable result?
- Are performance and progress quantified?
- Are goals specific (as opposed to the use of words such as “more” or better“)?
- Are actual results described as well as the process for achieving those results?
- Is the current reality described for each sub-objective?
- Does the plan include all relevant processes?
- Does the plan include the whole process?
- Does the plan specify the origin for all facts or knowledge?
- Are descriptions of the action steps accurate and concise?
- Does every action have a target metric?
- Are indicators appropriate for the task?
- Are indicators based on readily available, accurate and verifiable data?
- Does the plan strike the right balance within planning polarities and tensions?
- Does the plan allow for comparison with alternative organizations?
- Does the plan enhance organizational dialogue?
- Does the plan make action implementation easier?
- Is the plan aligned with mission, vision, values and beliefs?
- Does the plan ensure alignment between the macro-environment and the organization?
- Does the plan ensure alignment between different subsystems within the organization?
- Does the plan respect different perspectives and points of view?
- Is the plan supported and accepted by organizational members?
- Is the plan supported and accepted by organizational leaders?

TOOLS FOR EVALUATING A PLAN

Once you have worked out the details of your plan, the next stage is to review it to decide whether it is worth implementing. Here you must be objective – however much work you have carried out to reach this stage, the plan may still not be worth implementing.

This is frustrating after the hard work of detailed planning. It is, however, much better to find this out now than when you have invested time, resources and personal standing in the success of the plan. Evaluating the plan now gives you the opportunity to either investigate other options that might be more successful, or to accept that no plan is needed or should be carried out.

Depending on the circumstances, the following techniques can be helpful in evaluating a plan:

PMI (Plus/Minus/Interesting) | This is a good, simple technique for 'weighing the pros and cons' of a decision. It involves listing the plus points in the plan in one column, the minus points in a second column, and the implications and points of uncertainty of the plan in a third column. Each point can be allocated a positive or negative score.

Cost/Benefit Analysis | This is useful for confirming that the plan makes financial sense. This involves adding up all the costs involved with the plan, and comparing them with the expected benefits.

Force Field Analysis | Similar to PMI, Force Field Analysis helps you to get a good overall view of all the forces for and against your plan. This allows you to see where you can make adjustments that will make the plan more likely to succeed.

Cash Flow Forecasts | Where a decision has mainly financial implications, such as in business and marketing planning, preparation of a Cash Flow Forecast can be extremely useful. It allows you to assess the effect of time on costs and revenue. It also helps in assessing the size of the greatest negative and positive cash flows associated with a plan. When it is set up on a spreadsheet package, a good Cash Flow Forecast also functions as an extremely effective model of the plan. It gives you an easy basis for investigating the effect of varying your assumptions.

6 Thinking Hats | 6 Thinking Hats is a very good technique to use to get a rounded view of your plan and its implications. It provides a context within which you can examine a plan rationally, emotionally, optimistically, pessimistically and creatively.

Any analysis of your plan must be tempered by common sense.

If your analysis shows that the plan either will not give sufficient benefit, then either return to an earlier stage in the planning cycle or abandon the process altogether.

Excerpted from [MindTools](#).

PLANNING PROCESSES

SYSTEMS APPROACH

The entire planning rationale is based in a systems approach, stressing organic social processes, evolving structures and dynamic relationships.

Thinking about the organization as a set of interdependent systems, within a larger situation which is also a set of interdependent systems, helps the planner and decision-makers to discover alternative organizational behaviors and thus to successfully innovate. Systems' thinking also takes potential actions out of isolation, and allows the planner to see beyond simple cause and effect.

Larry Miller's summary, at left, provides a good basic introduction to systems architecture.

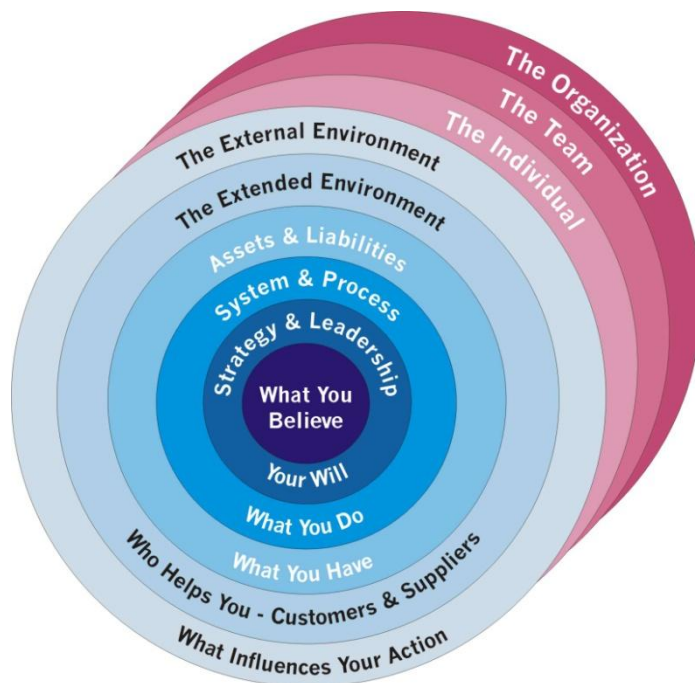
THE ORGANIZATION AS SYSTEM

Sometime in the early '80s Norman Bodek introduced me to the work of Lou Davis at UCLA and this led me to other writers and thinkers in the area of socio-technical systems (STS) and whole-systems thinking. My firm at the time took our *Team Management* process and expanded it to what we called *Whole System Architecture* which looked at the work system (technical work flow), the human or social systems of the organization, and the business systems (how money flows) and argued that these needed to be designed as one integrated whole, rather than in a disjointed piecemeal fashion.

The word “organization” is related to “organism” and “organic.” Both of these imply something alive, something into which has been breathed the mysterious spirit of life. And what matters if you want to improve performance is not the organization chart, but that spirit of life. If you improve that, then you have really done something useful.

The organization’s systems are much like the systems of the human body. The human body is a complex *whole-system*. Yet, it has various sub-systems – the nervous system and brain, the respiratory system, the digestive

system, the cardiovascular system and so forth. Each of these can be described as a separate system, but they are not really separate. Each is dependent on the other; they are inter-dependent systems of a whole. If one of these systems is suffering, it will impact all of the others. Often it is difficult to tell which system is the root cause of a problem. If the digestive system is malfunctioning it will quickly affect the nervous system and that may then impact the cardiovascular system. This exact same interdependency exists within the systems of an organization. For example, if the information systems do not provide effective information to work teams, it may appear that the work team structure is not effective. If incentives contradict (individual vs. team) the structure, it may appear that the team lacks the proper skills. It is obvious that a team’s performance will be “optimized” if all of the systems support the same performance; in other words, if they are *aligned*.



In order to create alignment and continuous learning it is helpful to have a mental model, an organized way of thinking about the organizational system. To be honest, I have developed, used and discarded five or six different whole-system models over the years. The above model is, I think, as good as any. This diagram can help you discover and analyze the components of your organization. Think about this series of circles as what you might find if you put that original circle representing the organization under the microscope.

The purpose of this or any other whole-systems model is to engage members of the organization in thinking about the current state of that system, understanding how the different components interact, and designing the ideal future system. The question you should ask yourself is, “Do we have a group in the organization who understand their job as thinking about, planning, designing and implement the ideal future system?” And, “Do they have a model and process for engaging in that analysis and design?” If not, you are lacking an important element of internal competitive strategy.

Larry Miller, [Management Meditations](#), *The Search for Cultures of Quality and Commitment*, Copyright © January 24, 2011

DIALOGIC PROCESS

Dialogue, as distinguished from discussion or negotiation, can transform a planning process.

Dialogic design rejects the assumption that organizations are problems to be solved, and instead consider them as complex social systems which benefit from diversity and variety.

Dialogue is particularly useful for:

- Resolving complex issues and “wicked choices”.
- Mapping design options in complex spaces.
- Transforming organizations.
- Decision-making in large groups.
- Planning and setting priorities.
- Root cause analysis.

Dialogic design holds that no single observer has the complete picture of complex problems, that everyone has limits for the amount of information they can process at any one time, and that in order to make judgments, we need to compare similar things.

Dialogue’s appreciation of diversity reflects LifeRing’s emphasis on choice in recovery. ‘What is essential here is the presence of the spirit of dialogue, which is in short, the ability to hold many points of view in suspension, along with a primary interest in the creation of common meaning.’ (Bohm)

For dialogue to be effective:

- There must be appreciation of the diversity of perspectives held by observers.
- Structure must be imposed in order to avoid cognitive overload.
- The relative importance of observations can only be understood through comparisons within an organized set.
- Meaning and wisdom are produced only when observers search for relationships within a set of observations.
- It is necessary to protect the autonomy and authenticity of each observer when drawing distinctions.
- Learning occurs in a dialogue as the observers search for relationships of influence among the members of a set of observations.

Whenever possible, principles from dialogic design have been incorporated into the planning processes associated with this rationale.

DIALOGUE

The late Professor David Bohm was Emeritus Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of London. He is perhaps best known for his work as a theoretical physicist; however, his interests in the areas of communication and dialogue date back to the 1950s. Bohm noted:

Dialogue "comes from the Greek word dialogos. Logos means 'the word' or in our case we would think of the 'meaning of the word.' And dia means 'through' -- it doesn't mean 'two'. Bohm points out that dialogue suggests a "stream of meaning" flowing among, through and between us. This makes it possible to create a flow of meaning in an entire group so that some new understanding will emerge. This in turn will create a shared meaning in the group that serves as the glue or cement that will hold the group together. The conversation becomes transformational rather than transactional.

In order for dialogue to take place, three conditions must be met.

1 | People must suspend assumptions. Bohm says that discussions and negotiations are not dialogue, because each represents a process whereby someone tries to win or convince others to assume the views of another. In dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points or prevail, and nobody tries to win. The primary objective of dialogue is to suspend your opinions and look at the opinions of others. All participants must learn to listen to what is on someone's mind and suspend judgment without coming to a conclusion. Dialogue requires an "empty place" to give all participants the necessary space to talk.

I like this because it talks about assumptions and opinions. People often ask, "How do I suspend my judgment?" Well, I'm not sure that's the real question to ask. Why not? Heck, in organizations we get paid to exercise "good judgment." That's the act of processing the totality of the information available to you. The real issue is not becoming judgmental about assumptions and opinions. I find that a more helpful way to address the issue.

2 | All participants must regard one another as colleagues. While authority and hierarchy permeate our organizations and relationships, dialogue can only take place when we can suspend those notions of authority. Since we must have an empty space in dialogue with no set agenda or program, it's easier to treat all participants as colleagues in a real dialogue setting.

3 | There must be a facilitator who holds the context of the dialogue. Opinions will be expressed that will likely differ from those of many participants in the group; however, all participants must refrain from entering into discussions that attempt to break down the opinions of those different from the participants.

Steve Roesler, All Things Workplace. February 5, 2009.

DIALOGUE ABOUT POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Once a planning structure and rationale are in place, the larger processes of planning begin. People contribute ideas and insights, and dialogue commences about whether to put those ideas into action. For every suggested organizational action, a decision must be made about whether it should appear in the plan. Dialogue about actions does not make those decisions, but it does create the analyses by which such decisions are eventually made:

INTERPRETATION

Decisions are based on shared meaning, so the first step is to be certain that the suggestion is meaningful and that the meaning is common and shared. Interpretation is largely a dialogue about definition. People don't have to agree that the action is valid, valuable, or right; just that we all mean close to the same thing when we talk about it. Dialogue about the meaning of an action will elicit insights about what else might be accomplished, and additional actions will emerge at various levels of detail. When there is more than one way to accomplish the action, each option becomes a new action to consider. When an action cannot be taken unless other actions precede it, those actions are joined. Dialogue about meaning takes us down to the bare bones of action, and also begins to shed light on relationships among actions and sets of actions. The end result of the process is a collection of well-defined actions and a group of people who are able to communicate about them meaningfully.

VALUATION

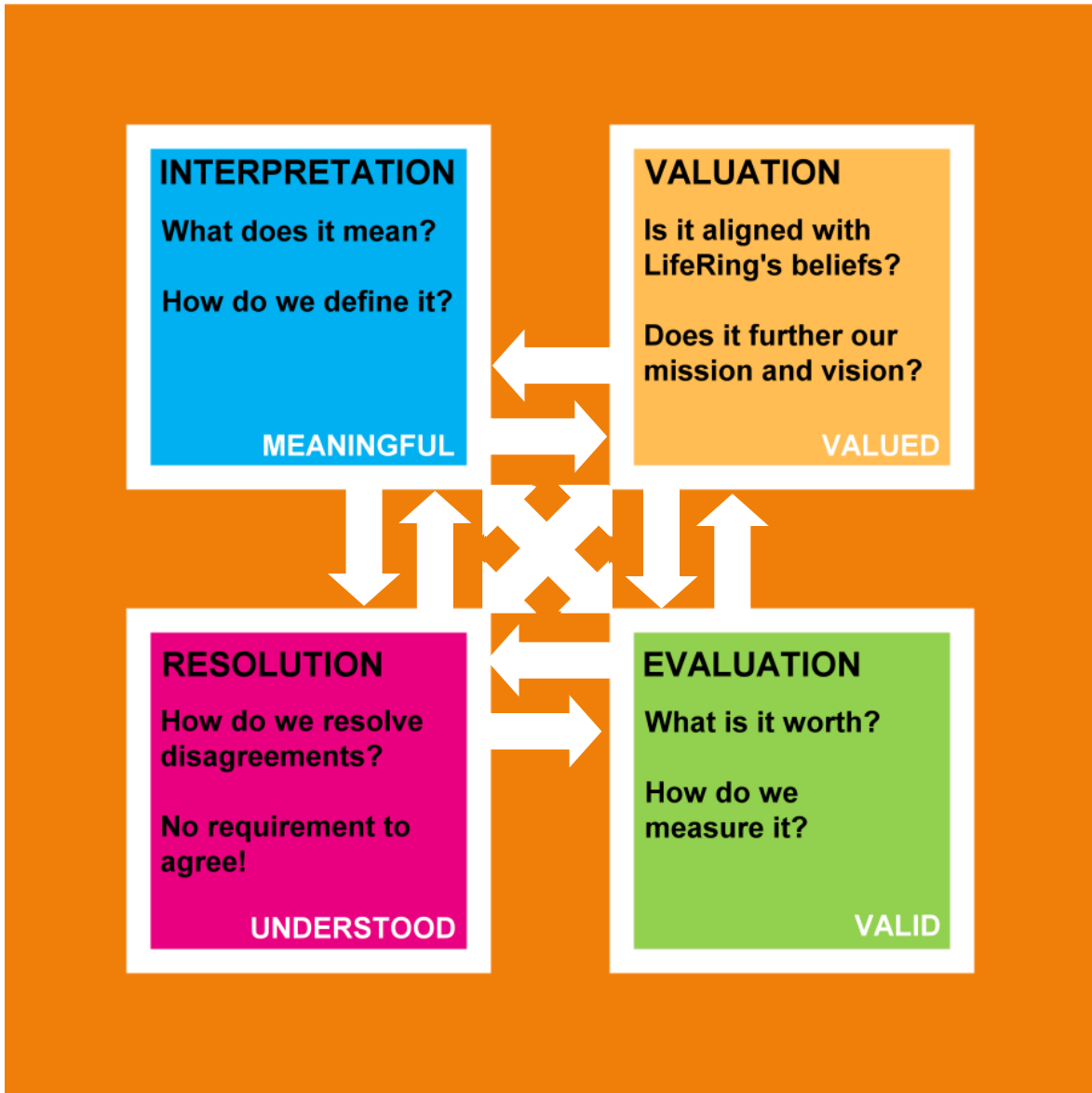
Once we've defined an action, it's time to consider whether it is something worth doing. Is it in keeping with our core values and beliefs? Does the action further our mission? Does it appear in our vision of the future? Here we consider means and ends. Some actions might be very effective in achieving a desired outcome, but conflict with significantly held beliefs, and seem therefore untenable. Other actions may be highly aligned with our values and beliefs, but do little to -achieve desired organizational outcomes, as opposed to individual outcomes. We also consider unintended results. The action itself may be aligned with our values, and might be quite effective, but have additional potential consequences that we can't abide. The end result of valuation is a set of value considerations for each potential action, as well as refinement of the organization's core values and beliefs.

EVALUATION

Once we have both an action and a set of value considerations for that action, we are compelled to consider whether our assignment of value is accurate, and whether we can measure the effects we are acting to achieve. First we consider the assumptions that form the basis for cause and effect thinking. How do we know that if we do this, that will result? We consider the evidence that supports each cause and effect relationship. Is the evidence valid? Is the source credible? Is our knowledge trustworthy? Are there other variables we need to consider? Do we need to test these ourselves? Evaluation requires that we set metrics for each action, and relate each action to the outcome we'd like to see. Over time, evaluation will provide the organization with a greater level of certainty, but the immediate result of the evaluation dialogue is the development of metrics and indicators which will inform us about our progress and performance, as well as refinement of the organization's knowledge base.

RESOLUTION

Once we've got an action, a set of related values, and a way of measuring outcomes, there may still be disagreements about whether the action should be included in the plan, or whether one action should be included rather than another. The rationale for long range planning we're using assigns those decision making tasks to the Board of Directors at the very end of the process, so the planning participants don't need to reach consensus, come to agreement, make the decision, or even negotiate! What participants do need to accomplish, through dialogue, is a full understanding of the difference of opinion, fact, or belief. The end result of resolution is an analysis to inform deferred decision-making.



DIALOGUE ABOUT THE PLAN ITSELF

Additional processes of integration and organization serve to categorize and discern relationships between potential actions, and to align them in a structured plan.

Planning progresses through stages, with constant iterative feedback loops. Dialogue about integration and organization of the plan – design – will occur throughout the planning process. As a written plan begins to take shape, people will want to discuss its merits. For some it will be too detailed, for others too simplified, some will find it challenging to their autonomy, others will see the plan as diluting organizational direction.

Everyone will be a little dissatisfied as planning tensions come into play, because it is impossible to fully realize the force at one end of any tension without losing the value of the opposing force at the other end of the tension. That's okay. The value of transforming inconsistent, incomprehensible, ambiguous and incomplete data into a consistent, comprehensive, clear and complete plan far outweighs the remaining tension.

The guiding forces in planning which attenuate polarity are the desires for consistency and clarity, and the hope that the resulting plan will be comprehensive and complete. Whenever planning moves too far to either end of any continuum, then clarity, consistency, comprehensiveness and completeness suffer. These, therefore, can serve as yardsticks for quality of both the process of planning and the content of the plan.

Organization and integration keep ideas and insights – people's contributions to planning – focused on what people share in common. This is different from majority rule, consensus, or even agreement. Diversity and variety can be a vital force in organizing. Indeed, differing points of view inspire innovation and build understanding.

INTEGRATION

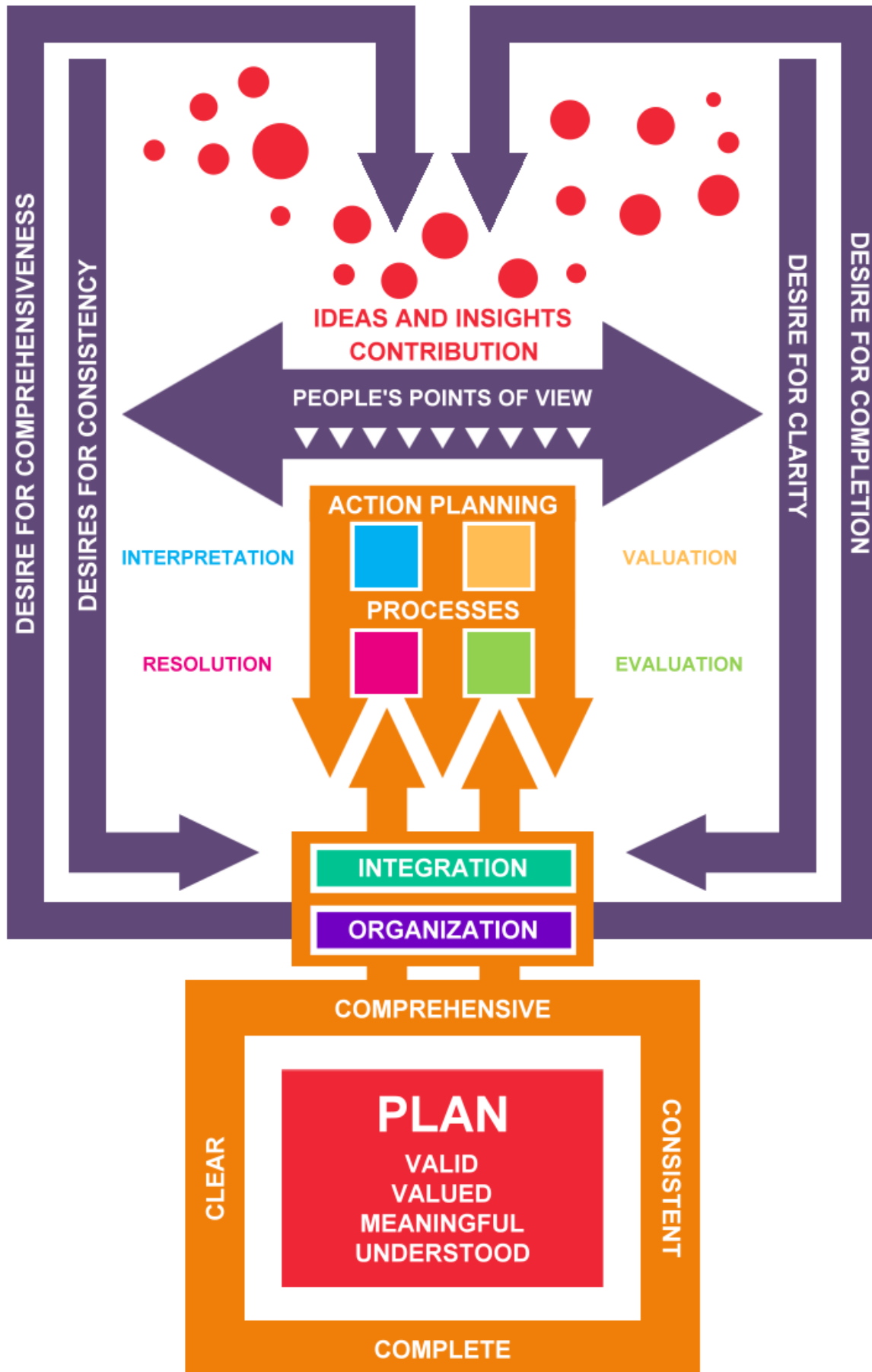
While dialogue about actions is a process of splitting and describing potential action with finer and finer detail, integrative dialogue is a process of orchestrating systems of action under common themes based on relationships. The tensions created by planning create strings of possibility, actions strike the notes, and integration arranges and harmonizes.

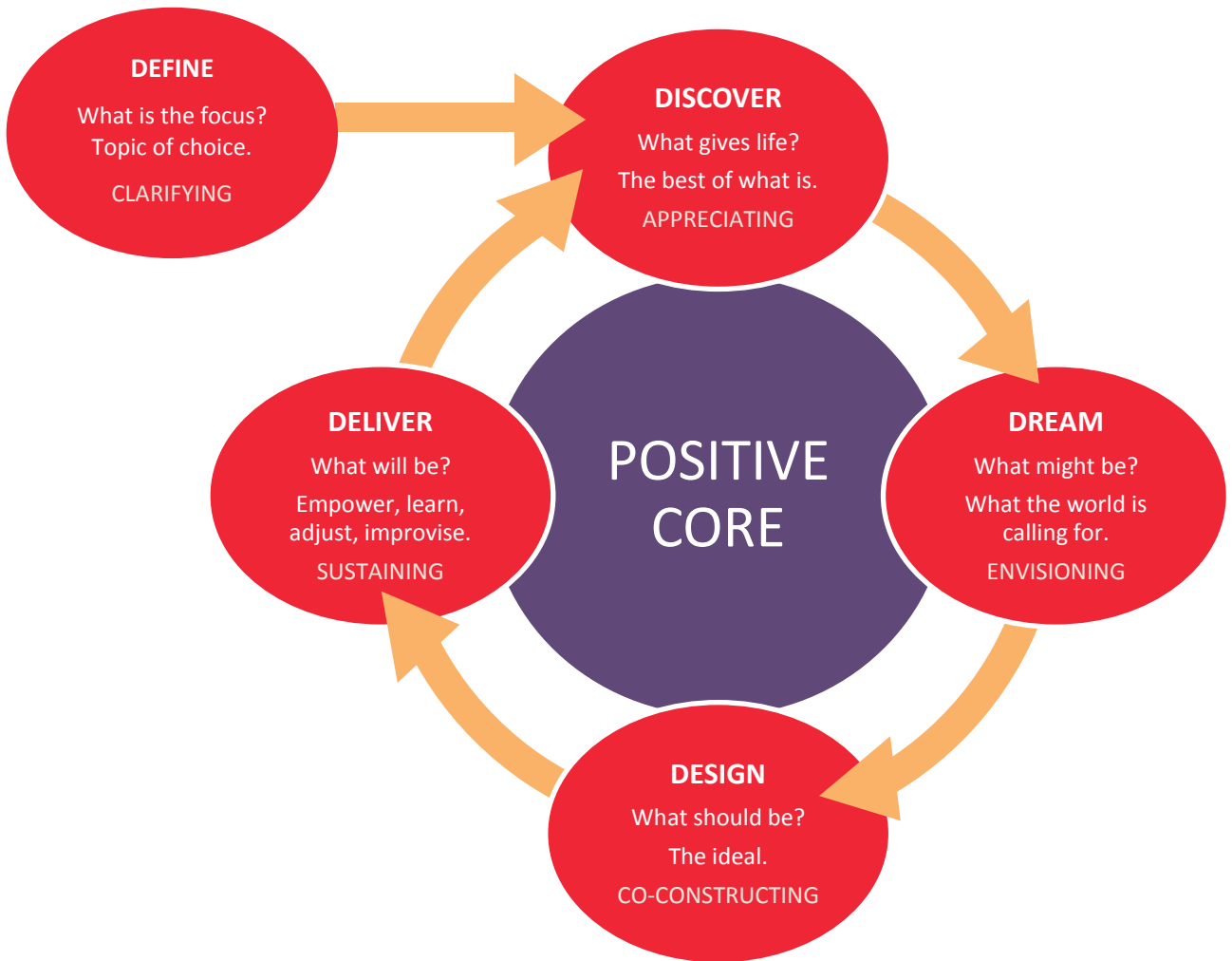
Integration is selective. Actions that are obviously discordant with the values of the organization are discarded, enhancing consistency. Actions which do not contribute substantially to desired outcomes are deleted, enhancing clarity. Integration is a broad and holistic process of orchestration.

ORGANIZATION

Organization sets the score, providing structure to general themes. Organization is not initially selective, but it does set boundaries for innovation and improvisation by firmly establishing foundations and aligning global and specific objectives beneath general goals, and by elaborating and analyzing alternative strategies.

Once a long range plan is adopted, organizing becomes actively selective as decision-makers allocate resources to areas of the plan, adopt strategies, and implement them.





AN EXAMPLE:

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe a high-point experience in your organization, a time when you have been most active and engaged.
2. Without being modest, tell me what it is that you most value about yourself, your work, your organization.
3. What are the core factors that give life to your organization, without which the organization would not be the same?
4. What three wishes do you have to enhance the health and vitality of your organization?

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry provides a positive focus to planning and organizational development. Appreciative Inquiry abandon traditional problem solving methods and turn instead to optimizing to what is best in the organization and its people. The process is designed to value past efforts, transform participation, create meaningful connections, encourage innovation, and elicit new visions.

DEFINITION

“Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives a system “life” when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. Appreciative Inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilizes inquiry through crafting an “unconditional positive question” often involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. In Appreciative Inquiry, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negative, criticism, and spiralling diagnosis there is discovery, dream, and design. Appreciative Inquiry assumes that every living system has untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive. Bring this “positive change core” directly to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized.”

Peggy Holman and Tom Devane, Voices That Count: Realizing the Potential of Change, from Appreciative Inquiry, Copyright © 1999 by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney

5-D PROCESS

Define | The process of inquiry begins with definition of affirmative topics of choice and development of questions for interviewing and dialogic processes based on each topic. Each question in the interviewing process is positive and generative.

Discover | Appreciative inquiry suggests that the planning process be open to everyone in the organization, because the activities themselves are intended to be inspiring and motivating, taking the organization beyond the planning process and into action. People are encouraged to connect in order to study the qualities, examples and analysis of the positive core of the organization. Donnan (2005) describes the result as ‘a rich description of the organization’s positive core – it’s tangible and intangible strengths, capabilities, resources, and assets’.

Dream | This stage stresses collaborative envisioning potential outcomes. Appreciative inquiry asks us to be inspired by those aspects of the organization worth valuing. Organizational stories that describe moments when the organization was “alive” inspire a hopeful vision for the future.

Design | In the design phase of appreciative inquiry, grounded examples from the organization’s positive past are used to develop goals and objectives, to “bridge the best of what is with the collective aspiration of what might be.” People challenge the status quo as well as common assumptions underlying the organization’s design.

Destiny | Appreciative inquiry stresses the importance of providing members of the organization the skills and opportunities to use a positive approach and to continue to discover, dream, and design as they develop the detail of the plan. Processes should be established to sustain the inquiry process throughout the organization.

CENTRAL PRINCIPLES

The Constructionist Principle: Human knowledge and organizational destiny are interwoven. To be effective, we must understand organizations as living, human constructions.

We are constantly involved in working to understand the world around us—doing strategic planning, environmental scans, audits, surveys, and so on. Constructionism replaces the *relationship* as the locus of knowledge by valuing the power of language to create our sense of reality.

Inquiry is inseparable from action. Its purpose is to create “generative theory.” Rather than explaining yesterday’s world, it articulates tomorrow’s possibilities.

The Principle of Simultaneity: Inquiry and change are not separate moments but simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention. The seeds of change—the things people think and talk about, the things people discover and learn, and the things that inform dialogue and inspire images of the future—are implicit in the first questions we ask. They set the stage for what we “find.” What we “discover” (the data) becomes the stories out of which the future is conceived. Therefore, one of the most impactful actions a change agent takes is to articulate questions.

One great myth is that first we analyze, and then we decide on change. Not so, says the constructionist view. Even the most innocent question evokes change—even if reactions are simply changes in awareness, dialogue, feelings of boredom, or laughter. When we consider that inquiry and change are a simultaneous moment, it is no longer, “Is my question leading to right or wrong answers?” but rather, “How does my question impact our lives together. Is it generating conversations about the good, the better, the possible?”

The Poetic Principle: Human organizations are like open books. An organization’s story is constantly being coauthored. Pasts, presents, and futures are endless sources of learning, inspiration and interpretation—like the endless interpretive possibilities in a good poem. The implication is that we can study any topic related to human experience. We can inquire into the nature of alienation or joy, enthusiasm or low morale, efficiency or excess, in any human organization.

Constructionism reminds us that “the world out there” doesn’t dictate our inquiries; rather, the topics are products of social processes (cultural habits, rhetoric, power relations). AI makes sure we are not just reproducing the same worlds over and over again through simple and boring repetition of our questions (not one more morale survey). AI also says, with excitement, that there are great gains in linking the means and ends of inquiry. For example, in talks with great leaders in non-government organizations (Save the Children, World Vision) we have begun to appreciate the profound joy that CEOs feel as “servant leaders.” The positive orientation plays a profound role in creating healthy organizations. Does this mean that joy has something to do with good leadership? Why aren’t we including this topic in our change efforts? What might happen if we did?

The Anticipatory Principle: our positive images of the future lead our positive actions—that is the increasingly energizing basis and presupposition of Appreciative Inquiry.

The infinite human resource we have for generating constructive organizational change is our collective imagination and discourse about the future. The image of the future guides any organization’s current behavior. Much like a movie projector to a screen, human systems are forever projecting expectations ahead of themselves. The talk in hallways, the metaphors and language, bring the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent. Inquiring in ways that redefine anticipatory reality—creating positive images together—may be the most important aspect of any inquiry.

In studies of positive imagery from athletics, research into relationships between optimism and health, placebo studies in medicine, and studies of the Pygmalion dynamics in the classroom, the conclusions are converging on something Aristotle said long ago: “A vivid imagination compels the whole body to obey it.”

The Positive Principle: Our experience is that building and sustaining momentum for change requires large amounts of positive outlook and social bonding—things like hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose, and sheer joy in creating something meaningful together. We find that the more positive the question we ask, the more long-lasting and successful the change effort.

*Appreciative Inquiry, by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney in
Collaborating for Change: edited by Peggy Holman and Tom Devane, Copyright
© 1999*

CREATING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

As Bushe (2007) said about the best questions: 'They are surprising; They touch people's heart and spirit; Talking about and listening to these stories and answers will build relationships; The questions force us to look at reality a little differently'.

World Café employs additional criteria to generate generative questions:

- Is this question relevant to the real life and real work of the people who will be exploring it?
- Is this a genuine question—a question to which I really don't know the answer?
- What “work” do I want this question to do? That is, what kind of conversation, meanings, and feelings do I imagine this question will evoke in those who will be exploring it?
- Is this question likely to invite fresh thinking or feeling? Is it familiar enough to be recognizable and relevant—and different enough to call forward a new response?
- What assumptions or beliefs are embedded in the way this question is constructed? Is this question likely to generate hope, imagination, engagement, creative action, and new possibilities or is it likely to increase a focus on past problems and obstacles?
- Does this question leave room for new and different questions to be raised as the initial question is explored?

Adapted from [The Art of Powerful Questions](#) by Vogt, Brown, and Isaacs, 2003; Sally Ann Roth, [Public Conversations Project](#) c. 1998; and [Appreciative Inquiry and World Cafe](#)

TELLING MEANINGFUL STORIES

- Stories are always about people.
- Your protagonist must want something.
- Fix your story in time and space.
- Let your characters speak for themselves.
- Surprise the audience.
- Speak the audience's language.
- Stir up emotions.
- Stories don't tell: They show.
- Include a “moment of truth.”
- Stories must have meaning.

Excerpted from “Telling Stories” by Andy Goodman. Board Member, Fundraising Fitness: A BoardSource Toolkit, March/April 2009.

IMPROVISATIONAL DESTINY



IMPROVISATIONAL DESTINY

The concepts of appreciative inquiry may be of great value in implementing choice and creating diversity in LifeRing's strategic planning and ongoing operations. The notion, suggested by Bushe, of improvisational destiny, described below, reflects the autonomy of LifeRing meetings and local organizing efforts. The social systems approach to innovation suggested by improvisational destiny also fits well with notions of creating multiple models and templates for continuing growth.

Frank Barrett, an appreciative inquiry practitioner, has noted that the destiny phase of inquiry is about an organization "Living on the Appreciative Edge" and improvising like a jazz band:

- a self-organizing system;
- dynamic tension between chaos and order;
- simultaneity in strategy and implementation;
- devoted to continual re-inquiry;
- open to novelty;
- questing to discover the best alternatives;
- supporting small, positive actions with large consequences;
- agile and adaptable.

When appreciative inquiry was truly transformational organizations didn't use action teams or try to manage implementation from the top. Instead they adopted an "improvisational approach" to the action phase.

The specifics varied from case to case but in every case new ideas emerged that were widely accepted. Authorities sanctioned people to do whatever made sense to them to move the organization toward its dreams and designs. Rather than trying to implement something, leaders looked for where people were innovating and helped them along when they could. This approach seemed far more generative – much more change occurred much more quickly. Here is my current recipe for a generative destiny phase 1.

1 | Create collective agreement on what you are trying to accomplish (the result of the first three D's). This is why the Appreciative Inquiry Summit (Ludema et al, 2003) has emerged as the most popular form of engagement for AI. By having as many people as possible involved in the process, in a contained space over a few days, widespread understanding and ownership of the Dream and Design are much higher.

2 | Ensure that people believe they are authorized to take actions that will move the organization in the direction of the Design. They don't need permission to act. They shouldn't wait around for some committee or plan. Leaders should clarify what is out of bounds and then get out of the way

3 | Create commitments by everyone to take some kind of initial action. Salancik (1978) argues that commitment gets created when people take actions that are voluntary, visible, and relatively irreversible and those are good things to think about when constructing events to launch the Destiny phase.

4 | Rather than planning and controlling, leadership needs to look for any and all acts that move the organization in the desired direction and find ways to support and amplify those efforts. I call this tracking (looking for where what you want more of already exists) and fanning (adding oxygen to a small fire to create a blaze) and have described this leadership style in more detail elsewhere (Bushe & Pitman, 1991; Bushe, 2001b).

A comparative case study of appreciative inquiries in one organization: implications for practice. Gervase R. Bushe. Review of Research and Social Intervention, Volume 29, 2010.

SOAR

Taking Appreciative Inquiry one step further, the SOAR process is intended to provide an alternative to traditional problem-solving goal-setting formulas. The purposes of the process include:

- Definition and communication of organizational values.
- Clarity of vision, mission, goals, and objectives.
- Openness to new ideas and opportunities from the outside.
- Self-confidence, self-reliance and self-respect at the organizational level.
- Improved organizational capacities and individual and functional capabilities.
- Build multi-organizational and global capacity.
- Stakeholder ownership and responsibility for the organization's existence and future.
- A participatory strategic planning process where everyone is free to voice concerns and opinions.
- Creation of new knowledge that is practical and useful.
- Consideration for important issues and needs of stakeholders.
- Acceptance of new relationships and responsibilities that will build strategic capacity at all levels.

Stavros, Jacqueline, David Cooperrider and D. Lynn Kelley. Strategic Inquiry to Appreciative Intent: Inspiration to SOAR: A New Framework for Strategic Planning. AI Practitioner, Volume, November, 2003.

STRATEGIC INQUIRY TO APPRECIATIVE INTENT: INSPIRATION TO SOAR		
STRATEGIC INQUIRY	Strengths What are our greatest assets?	Opportunities What are the best possible market opportunities?
APPRECIATIVE INTENT	Aspirations What is our preferred future?	Results What are the measurable results?

Stavros, Cooperrider, and Kelley, 2003

INQUIRE

Appreciative inquiry transforms the traditional SWOT model (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) into SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, results). "The process uses unconditional positive questions to discover the organization's core values, vision, strengths and potential opportunities."

IMAGINE

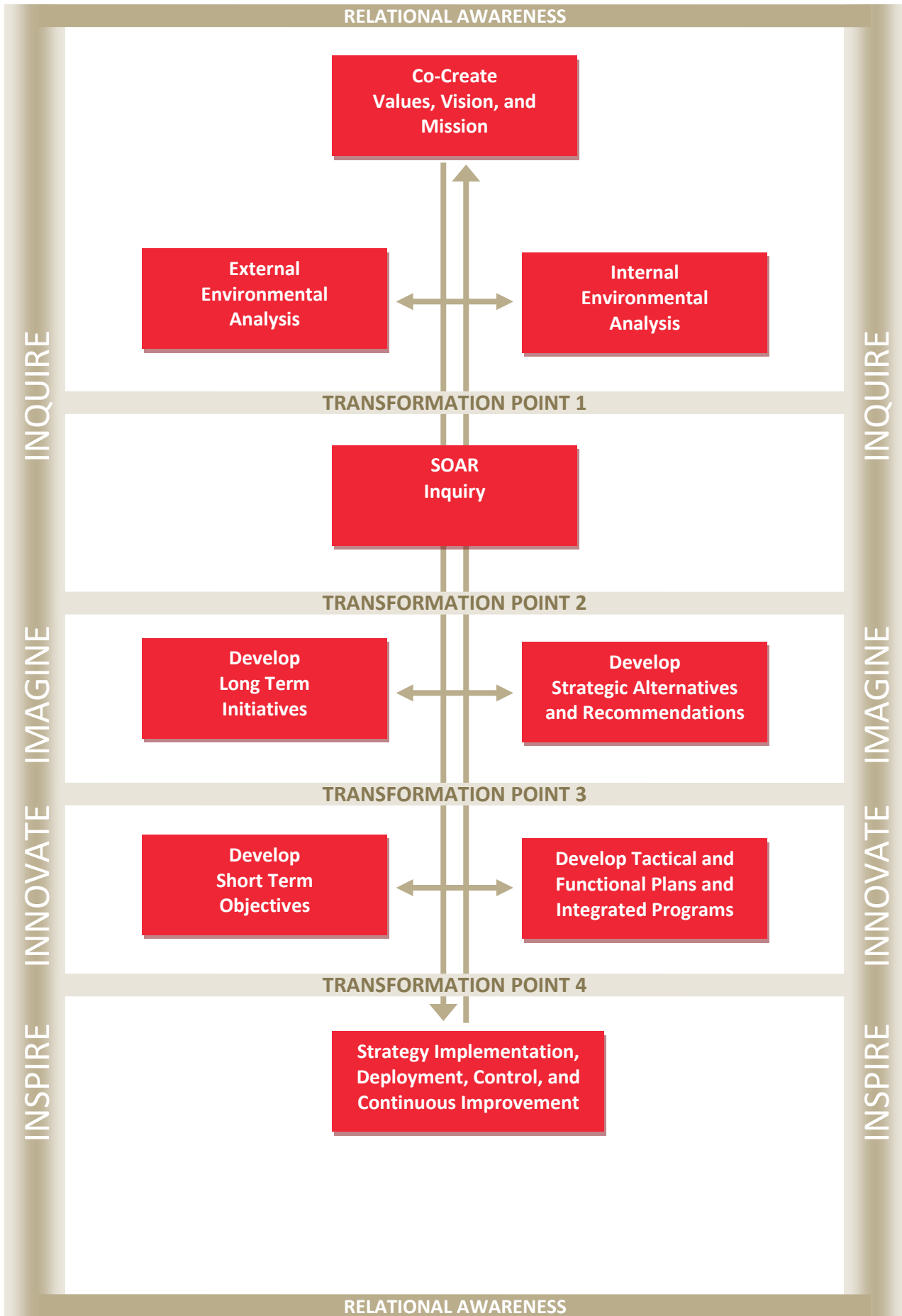
Following inquiry, participants are asked to collaborate to construct a preferred future. This process results in definition of values and beliefs, and creation of vision and mission statements.

INNOVATE

Once the foundations have been established, participants begin to design objectives, plans, integrated programs, structures and systems to achieve the desired future.

INSPIRE

Throughout the planning process, consideration is given to rewarding participants for their contributions, valuing and recognizing their insights and ideas.



SUGGESTED READING

BOOKS

Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling, Harold Kerzner. 8th Edition.

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference. Malcolm Gladwell. Little Brown, 2000.

Nonprofit Board Answer Book II: Beyond the Basics. Robert C. Andringa, Sandra Sabo, and Outi Flynn. BoardSource, Washington, D.C., 2002.

The Nonprofit Survival Guide: Finding Your Way in the New Economy. BoardSource, Washington, D.C., 2003.

But Will It Fly? Jerr Boschee. National Center for Social Enterprise, 1996.

Social Entrepreneurship: The Art of Mission-Based Venture Development. Peter C. Brinckerhoff Wiley Nonprofit Law, Finance, and Management Series. New York: Wiley, 2000.

Organization Development & Change. Thomas G. Cummings and Christopher G. Worley.

Starting and Managing a Nonprofit Organization: A Legal Guide. Bruce R. Hopkins. Wiley Nonprofit Law, Finance, and Management Series. Wiley, New York, 2001.

The Art of the Start: The Time-Tested, Battle-Hardened Guide for Anyone Starting Anything. Guy Kawasaki. Portfolio, New York, 2004.

Minding Your Business: Nonprofit Business Planning. Gigi Woodruff and Elaine Woloshyn. Center for Nonprofit Excellence.

Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge. 2nd Edition. W. Bennis and B. Nanus. Harper Business., New York, 1997.

Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't. J. Collins. Harper Business, New York, 2001.

Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversations. Kees van der Heijden.

Changing Ways: A Practical Tool for Implementing Change Within Organizations. Murray Dalziel and Stephen C. Schoonover. Amacom/American Management Association, New York, 1988.

The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom.

Appreciative Inquiry Handbook. D. Cooperrider, D. Whitney, and J. Stavros. Berrett-Koehler, p. xvii. San Francisco, CA, 2005.

ARTICLES

- Appreciative Inquiry Is Not (Just) About the Positive.** Gervase R. Bushe, Ph.D. OD Practitioner, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp.30-35, 2007.
- A Comparative Case Study of Appreciative Inquiries in One Organization: Implications for Practice.** Gervase R. Bushe. Review of Research and Social Intervention, Volume 29. 2010.
- Ad Hoc Planning Management: A Practical Guide for Administrators and Managers.** Jae Choie and Paul Lyons. Frostburg State College, Maryland, May 1974.
- Strategic Planning for Nonprofits and the Value of Integrated Planning.** Samuel B. Frank. Synthesis Partnership, 2008.
- Polarity Management: A Summary Introduction.** Barry Johnson Ph. D. Polarity Management Associates, September, 1998.
- Using Problem Structuring Methods in Strategic Planning.** Colin Thunhurst and Carol Barker. Health Policy and Planning; 14(2):127-134. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Democracy and Bureaucracy in a Community Planning Process.** Robert J. Chaskin. Journal of Planning Education and Research 24:408-419, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, 2005.
- Voices That Count: Realizing the Potential of Change.** Peggy Holman and Tom Devane. From Appreciative Inquiry, by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, 1999.
- Strategic Inquiry to Appreciative Intent: Inspiration to SOAR: A New Framework for Strategic Planning.** Jacqueline Stavros, David Cooperrider and D. Lynn Kelley. AI Practitioner, Volume, November, 2003.
- Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Approach to Change.** Edwin C. Thomas.
- Twelve Reasons Why Planning is More Critical in Challenging Times.** Critical Issues Newsletter. Synthesis Partnership, 2009.
- The Structure of Planning.** Critical Issues Newsletter. Synthesis Partnership, 2010.
- Why Should Organizations Plan?** BoardSource: Building Effective Nonprofit Boards, excerpted from "Driving Strategic Planning: A Nonprofit Executive's Guide" by Sue Waechter,
- Boundaryless Facilitation: Maximizing Team Learning Through Boundaryless Facilitation.** Amy Eunice, Lisa Kimball, Trish Silber, & Nedra Weinstein.
- Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System.** Etienne Wenger, Published in the "Systems Thinker," June 1998
- Dashboards: Track Your Organizational Progress.** Karl Hedstrom, NTEN.
- Performance Management and KPIs:** Linking Activities to Vision and Strategy. MindTools.
- Problem Structuring in Decision-Making Processes.** Joanne Vinke-De Kruijf.
- Shaping the City: Concerns about long-range development plans are often unfounded.** Roger K. Lewis. Washington Post. March 25, 2011.
- Wicked Problems.** Wikipedia.