

Communications Issues

Issue 02

A Community Service of Harley House Consultants Inc.



Strategic Planning Toolkit

Introduction

The professionals of **Harley House Consultants Inc.** are frequently asked to assist clients in the facilitation of strategic planning sessions. These sessions range from the formulation of strategic communications plans to the development of corporate strategies. To maximize the value of these sessions and to ensure buy-in, we make use of a range of tools, including:

- Creative Thinking Processes
- Logic Models
- Management Action Plans

Each of these tools is briefly discussed below.

Creative Thinking Processes

If an organization wishes to move beyond simple, tried-and-proven, one dimensional ideas, it is necessary to think outside of the box to generate those second and third generation ideas that set an effective strategy apart from the run-of-the-mill ones. However, thinking creatively is easier said than done.

Over the years we have found the writings of Roger von Oech (Author of “*A Whack on the Side of the Head*” and “*A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*”) to be particularly useful in assisting the creative thinking process. Mr. Von Oech promotes the Four Roles of the Creative Process, which sees the creative thinker wear the following four hats throughout the creative thinking process:

Explorer. Collect raw material and look under rocks to find material to build an idea.

Artist. Rearrange the raw material, look at it up-side down and backwards and mould it to create something new.

Judge. Sit back and ask yourself, “Is this idea any good? Is it worth pursuing? Will it give me the return I want? Do I have the resources to make this happen?” Evaluate the evidence, weight the options, and ultimately make a decision.

Warrior. If you want your idea to succeed, you’ll have to take the offensive. So, you become a warrior and take your idea into battle.

Having participants recognize the four hats of the creative process helps guide and encourage the process. It also helps participants understand where their colleagues are coming from when they comment on each other’s ideas - not everyone wears the same hats at the same time.

Logic Models

One of the tools that we frequently employ when carrying out strategic planning assignments is a Logic Model.

This simple model serves to summarize the strategy on a single page. By tying the communications strategy with corporate objectives and possibly the organization’s positioning or mission statement, senior management can see how the strategy is integrated with and supports the overall direction of the organization.

Making Communicators Better Managers—Making Managers Better Communicators



2. Strategic Planning Toolkit

We make use of simple questions such as:

- “What is the Corporate Direction?”;
- “How are we going to get there?”; and
- “How will we know if we are getting there?”.

Use of the model also removes some of the perceived black magic of strategic planning.

The Logic Model is typically drafted during the early stages of the assignment. It is then reviewed with senior management to ensure that the essence of the organization has been captured, and that everyone is in agreement with the direction and emphasis of the strategy. The Model also facilitates challenging individual objectives and strategic initiatives by relating them back to the corporate objectives and intended impacts/effects.

Once the model has been discussed, and agreement reached, the detailed drafting of the strategy proceeds.

Making use of such a model:

- typically reduces the time it takes to prepare a strategy;
- ensures that the final product is on the mark; and
- helps gain senior management buy-in and support for the strategy since they were involved early on in its development, and can relate to the model of the strategy.

Management Action Plans

At the end of the day an organization may have developed some really creative concepts and demonstrated the logic of the strategy through the modelling process, but will most likely fail to accomplish its objectives unless it prepares an action plan on how to move forward with the strategy. We have found the preparation of Management Action Plans (MAPs) to be a very effective tool to:

- document objectives
- define overall activities to be undertaken
- prepare specific detailed steps to be followed
- assign roles and responsibilities
- prepare budgets and schedules

These MAPs are prepared using a table template. The template is also an effective management tool to record progress as to the status of implementation of the strategy.

These types of strategic planning assignments are well suited for **Harley House Consultants Inc.** given our high degree of objectivity. Since we are a firm that specializes in communications management as opposed to the provision of creative or public relations services, the end result is a strategy that best meets the needs of our clients, rather than best meeting our capacity to implement the strategy.

For more information on how Harley House Consultants Inc. can assist you in:

- Managing internal and external relationships with key stakeholder groups; and
- Improving the effectiveness of your organization's communications and consultation programs,

Please contact Dale Harley at 613-882-5684, or email dale@harleyhouse.com