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SIX QUESTIONS EVERY FLORIDA AGENCY SHOULD ASK AND ANSWER: PRACTICAL STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

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Every year, Florida public agencies are required to develop so-called strategic plans. But instead of being strategic and linking to adding measurable value to Floridians, these efforts shift to the planning of tactics and assume that existing agency goals are useful or even correct. And each year we are often disappointed with what our agencies deliver to our citizens. This disappointment comes from agencies not asking and answering the right questions.

We are missing vital leadership in doing this. Strategic leadership requires that current goals and objectives be questioned against value-added criteria and, if required, modify their goals and objectives. Not doing so risks organizations keep doing the same things year after year without being responsive to new and evolving social, economic, and cultural realities. Instead of leading valuable change and contributions they are simply the custodians of doing the same things but perhaps more efficiently. Not having the correct objectives leads to the inherent systems of financial, and performance disincentives that are crippling to positive change.

Strategic leadership, strategic planning, and then management, must realize that is vital that what everyone contributes, both individually and together, adds value both within and outside each organization. Effective leadership best aligns what an organization uses, does, produces and delivers with what clients both want and which are useful. Strategic leaders obtain shared commitment based on useful results.

Purpose: leadership and finding useful direction for the organization. Whether formalized or not, individuals and organizations have purpose. It is imperative that leaders—strategic leaders-- not only help define a valuable shared purpose but also ensure that the defined purpose is accepted and used by all stakeholders. Purpose drives everything an organization uses, does, produces, and delivers and should define what talent and their development must deliver. Statements of purpose must be both valid and measurable and tied to measurable results-referenced criteria.

Leadership is about influence. A successful leader enrolls all stakeholders in defining and delivering results useful for all. Successful strategic leaders are about both influence and defining useful purpose.

Legendary thinkers Peter F. Drucker and Frances Hesselbein, champion that the underlying purpose of all organizations is to make our world a better place for all, using our organizations as the vehicle. They provide five clear questions that every organization—including agencies in the State of Florida-- should ask and answer in order for them to be responsive and responsible:

1. What is our mission?
2. Who is our customer?
3. What does the customer value?
4. What are our results?
5. What is our plan?

These simple questions all point to—but do not explicitly specify-- adding value to all people within and external to the organization.

To make societal value added explicit, I suggest one more purpose-driven question to provide clear and explicit guidance for adding value within our organizations as well those outside of it, including our shared society:

6. What measurable value will we add to all stakeholders, both internal and external?

Why this sixth question? All organizations are means to societal ends. I urge that the commitment to add measurable value to all partners become formal, rigorous, and explicit. These six questions, when answered, will allow leaders and associates define how they can individually and collectively contribute to success; success within and external to the organization. This is how strategic leaders should operate and how strategic planning should progress.

Strategic leadership requires rigorous criteria for planning and success. When leadership and planning has a primary focus on societal value-added, that defines strategic leadership. By making it formal and explicit, it provides the criteria for serious strategic and tactical planning, alignment of planning, design, development, management, implementation, talent development, evaluation, and continual improvement. It also provides the basis for costs-consequences assessments.

An external focus provides the opportunity to assess the viability of the organization to contribute and provide the clarifying opportunity to ask and answer “if my organization is the solution, what’s the problem? This focus on adding the purpose of societal value is basic to strategic leadership.

Failure to focus on societal value-added is often catastrophic. The organizational landscape is cluttered with failed and ineffective public agencies. It is also suggested by some economists that some countries, states, cities, and territories might not be far behind.

Most of these failed organizations did some sort of ‘formal’ planning, even calling it ‘strategic planning.’ One common element in all of these failures seems to be leaving out, or assuming, external clients as the primary focus of the planning equation. Leaving out societal value turns leadership and planning to tactical or even just operational concerns. This lower-level focus is not strategic planning and it is not useful.

Measurable criteria are vital to defining and delivering organizational success. Not having measurable criteria is an invitation to failure. What could be more practical than publicly agreeing on 'where are we headed, why do we want to get there, and how do we know when we have arrived?

I suggest a framework termed an Ideal Vision. This is a statement of measurable ultimate purposes. The Ideal Vision is most useful when formally applied. It is ideal and provides a perfect world toward which all can continually steer while uniquely contributing to the shared journey. Because it is measurable, we can place our purposes in our organizational GPS and plan our individual and group contributions and our progress:

No person will be under the care, control, or custody of another person, agency, or substance. There will be no losses of life, nor elimination or reduction of levels of well-being, survival, self-sufficiency, or quality of life from any source or intervention.

No one organization is responsible for achieving all of the Ideal Vision on their own or achieving it in the short-term, but if we don't state the ideal, we cannot steer sensibly to moving ever-closer to achieving it. And we cannot identify for what each of our agencies must contribute to the whole of Florida.

By applying the Six Questions, those responsible for organizational success may make sensible and practical decisions about aligning the entire organization with an over-arching focus on adding measurable value external to the organization.

External Client and Societal Value Delivered (Mega)



What Organizations Deliver (Macro)



What Individuals Deliver (Micro)



What Individuals Do (Process)



Human, Financial, and Physical Resources (Inputs)

Energizing strategic leadership. Mega, and the measurable criteria, provide the essential definition for strategic leadership in order to, together, define and help deliver useful results, both within and outside the organization. It provides the guidance for the consequences, involvement, commitment, and contributions of all associates and will help define and justify what skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities talent must acquire and apply.

With a formal purpose and commitment to adding value to all stakeholders, the Six Questions become more powerful and put a focus on what those questions previously implied: a societal focus. It emphasizes the intent to assure a measurably better organization and shared society. It defines and provides strategic leadership.

Suggested readings

Drucker, P.F., Hesselbein, F. et. al. (2015) Five Most Important Questions: Enduring Wisdom of Today's Leaders. Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.

Kaufman, R. & Guerra-Lopez, I. (2008) The Assessment Book: Applied Strategic Thinking and Performance Improvement Through Self- assessments. Amherst, MA. HRD Press Inc.

Kaufman, R. (2011) A Manager's Pocket Guide to Strategic Thinking and Planning. Amherst, MA. HRD Press, Inc.

Kaufman, R. & Guerra-Lopez (2013) Needs Assessment for Organizational Success. Arlington, VA., ATD/ASTD.

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