

TMR Participatory Planning Methods

TMR participatory planning is based on methods developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). In developing these methods the ICA worked with individuals, communities and organizations to develop ways to maximize creativity and corporate action. During its early years the ICA worked largely with local communities, helping them to plan and implement comprehensive social and economic development. Because of the voluntary and informal nature of these groups, techniques were needed that generated and sustained motivation and commitment. In business settings, participatory planning has boosted progress, improved performance and yielded impressive management results. Employees, stakeholders and volunteers involved in planning and problem-solving tasks can animate and inspire a project team, a department, a corporation or organization, even an entire community. This surge of commitment can ignite the energy, enthusiasm and creativity essential to success in today's competitive environment.

Response to these programs has been enthusiastic. High praises have been common among nonprofit and corporate clients for the participatory methods ability to:

- Produce action plans that get done.
- Accomplish in a short time what would have taken weeks or even months to accomplish with traditional planning methods.
- Bring together a wide range of perspectives, resulting in a comprehensive plan.
- Generate commitment on the part of participants that resulted in quick, effective implementation.
- Build team spirit.
- Follow-up with strategic reviews that kept plans on track, even when circumstances changed.

Many organizations have discovered that the more participatory methods are used, the more useful they become. Many clients who engage in these methods initially for problem solving or strategic planning find that it works equally well for team building, leadership development, redefining the corporate mission and philosophy and strengthening organizational development.

There are five benefits organizations gain from the use of participative planning and problem solving.

1. **The specific plans themselves -- strategies, solutions, action plans .** A world of rapid change requires constant planning and replanning, as circumstances change, as new competitors burst on the scene, as events require mid-course correction. Organizations need more planning and problem-solving today; they cannot run on automatic pilot. Thus, bringing together those with expertise and a stake in an issue is the fastest way to tackle problems, address opportunities and define new directions.
2. **Greater commitment and ability to implement decisions and strategies.** When people participate in a planning process, they are more likely to be committed to the plans, because they have talked them through, because the plans reflect their own thinking and because the group has developed consensus. Organizations also find their people better equipped to carry out the plans when they participate in shaping them because they are more knowledgeable and informed. They better understand the needs, the goals and where their own responsibilities fit in with those of others.
3. **More innovation-a larger portfolio of ideas.** Involvement of more people in the planning process, especially a mixture of people with different perspectives, generates new insights into problems and encourages a fresh look at opportunities. The cross-fertilization from a group bringing diverse backgrounds to a planning task can sometimes result in breakthrough strategies.
4. **A common framework for decision-making, communication, planning and problem solving.** The team-building effects of participation extend well beyond the "high" of a successful planning session. A group with a common vocabulary and methodology for working together does not have to argue over procedure but can go right to work. Thus, meetings become more productive and teamwork is enhanced.
5. **Encouragement of initiative and responsibility.** This is the least tangible and longest-term benefit and perhaps the most important. People who have been involved in participative planning are more likely to feel a sense of ownership for their part of the organization. They are more likely to take action when they see a problem or an opportunity, rather than assume it's someone else's responsibility.

Many organizations around the world have used these methods extensively to bring about alignment within large complex organizations, or to affect major change within internal structures and/or operating strategies. Participatory methods have helped all types and all sizes of organizations throughout the world, be they commercial or not-for-profit, public or private, local in scope and service or world-class.