



# **BUILDING BRIDGES**

between citizens and local governments  
to work more effectively together

## **THROUGH PARTICIPATORY PLANNING**

### **Part I CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	4
<b>PROLOGUE</b>	5
<b>ABOUT THIS MANUAL</b>	6
<b>CHAPTER 1. PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATORY PLANNING</b>	7
A brief look at PRA	8
PRA principles	8
Some typical PRA methods and approaches	8
The World Bank and participation	9
Gender and participation	10
NGOs, CBOs and participation	11
UNCHS (Habitat): Bridging the gap	11
The private sector and participation	12
Participation is never easy	12
What makes for successful collaboration (participation)	13
Lessons learned by UN-Habitat on the road to participation	14
What keeps collaboration from happening (or being successful when it does happen)?	14
A stroll through lexicon valley	15
The ladder of participation	17
In summary	18
Key points	18
Endnotes	19
<b>CHAPTER 2. ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING</b>	20
Social capital	20
Issues of trust, norms of reciprocity and civic engagement	21
Participatory planning as a process for building social capital	22
Local governments, unique institutions	22
Principles of effective participatory planning	23
How principled is your local government?	24
Communication, shared leadership and teamwork: core skills in the participatory planning process	24
Key points	30
Endnotes	31
<b>CHAPTER 3. INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS</b>	32
A preview of the PP process	32
Some concluding introductory remarks	33
Key points	34
Endnotes	34
<b>CHAPTER 4. PHASE I: INITIATING THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS</b>	35
Problems and opportunities	36
Awareness and vision	36
Participatory planning options	37
Putting awareness and vision into action: The decision to involve others	38
Key points	40
Endnotes	40
<b>CHAPTER 5. PHASE II: BUILDING PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS</b>	41
Step One: Deciding to get help	41
Step Two: The initial meeting between facilitator and client	44
Step Three: Working with the “Primary” client	46
Key points	48
Endnotes	48

<b>CHAPTER 6. PHASE III: REACHING OUT - OR - FOCUSING IN</b>	49
Gaining perspective	49
Where the two planning approaches diverge	49
Strategic planning: the art of reaching out and gathering in the future	50
Visions and visioning	50
Strategic qualities	51
A quick survey of the strategic planning landscape	51
From reaching out to focusing in	55
Focusing in	55
Asking questions	56
Key points	57
Endnotes	57
<b>CHAPTER 7. PHASE IV: FACT FINDING AND ANALYSIS</b>	58
Fact-finding and analysis: going back-and moving forward	58
Returning to the pit stop	59
The art and science of analysis	59
Key points	67
Endnotes	67
<b>CHAPTER 8. PHASE V: PLANNING A COURSE OF ACTION</b>	68
Step one: narrowing the options	69
Step two: confirmation and ownership	70
Step three: detailing the plan	70
Step four: considering consequences	70
Step five: contingency plans	71
Step six: sequencing planned events	71
Key points	72
<b>CHAPTER 9. PHASE VI: IMPLEMENTING PLANS, MEASURING SUCCESS AND MOVING ON</b>	73
Implementing participatory planning activities	73
Some ideas to ponder on the way to implementation	74
Criteria for assessing impact	77
Moving on	78
Key points	79
Endnotes	79

## FOREWORD

This series of training manuals coincides with the launch of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) Global Campaign on Urban Governance. The theme of “inclusiveness,” reflecting the Campaign’s vision and strategy, is deeply embedded in the themes and learning strategies covered by these manuals. While they have been planned and written to serve the developmental needs of non-governmental and community-based organisations, their leadership and staff, the context for learning implementation is consistently conveyed within the spirit and reality of widespread collaboration.

There is growing evidence and increased recognition of several themes that define and frame the urban governance agenda for the new century and millennium. The first, inclusiveness, implies that local governments and communities that want to be on the leading edge of social and economic change must recognise the importance of including everyone, regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, in the process of forging decisions that affect their collective quality of life.

The second recognition involves shared leadership that cuts across the spectrum of institutional and community fabric. Ideally, these shared leadership forums will be based on mutual trust, open dialogue among all stakeholders, and a wide range of strategies for turning good ideas and common visions into concrete actions.

As described in the Prologue, this series of learning implementation tools has been a collaborative effort by Partners Romania Foundation for Local Development, UNCHS (Habitat) and the Open Society Institute. Major funding for the project was provided by the Open Society Institute’s Local Government Initiative Programme with other financial support from UNCHS (Habitat) and the Government of the Netherlands. Partners Romania managed the project under its Regional Programme for Capacity Building in Governance and Local Leadership for Central and Eastern Europe. These responsibilities included field testing the Participatory Planning and Managing Conflict and Differences manuals in a training of trainers programme involving 18 participants from 13 Central and Eastern European countries and members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The initiatives for launching this series of training manuals came from two different regions of the world. The Steering Committee for the Regional Capacity Building Programme for Central and Eastern Europe identified conflict management and participatory planning as two of their region’s training needs during their deliberations in 1997. In addition, a diverse group of NGO, CBO and local government leaders from across Sub-Saharan Africa met in 1998 and identified these topics, as well as others covered in this series, as important training needs.

Finally, I want to thank Fred Fisher the principal author of the series and the superb team of writing collaborators he pulled together to craft these materials. These include: Ana Vasilache, director of Partners Romania, who managed the process from Romania; Kinga Goncz and Dusan Ondrusek, directors of Partners Hungary and Slovakia respectively; David Tees, who has contributed to many UNCHS publications over the years; the trainers who participated in the field tests of the materials; and, the team of UNCHS staff professionals, headed by Tomasz Sudra, who brought their considerable experience and expertise to fine tune the final products.

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## PROLOGUE

There's a story lurking behind the development of these materials. It's worth taking a few moments to share with you. As indicated in the Foreword, this particular project had its initial roots in two major regions of the world, Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Sahara Africa. But, efforts to develop and disseminate user friendly training materials started many years ago with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) commitment to provide training materials for local government officials in developing countries.

The UNCHS Elected Leadership Series of training manuals, developed within the Local Leadership and Management Training Programme, was particularly popular. It includes 13 manuals designed to help local government elected officials increase their knowledge and skills in key leadership roles and responsibilities. The series, available in more than fifteen languages, is used worldwide, not only by local government elected officials but leaders in non-governmental and community-based organisations. It was the adaptation of this series by the social sector that prompted UNCHS (Habitat) to initiate this series.

Several factors contributed to the success of these learning materials. First, they were user friendly. Trainers could be trained to use the materials in less than two weeks with the second week devoted to their conducting workshops for elected officials representing either the host country or countries represented by the trainers. Second, UNCHS encouraged the adaptation of the materials to reflect cultural, linguistic and other differences represented by the user community. User groups were encouraged to make changes in the text, the training designs and the suggested delivery modes to meet the particular needs of constituents. Potential users of training materials are rarely given such explicit freedom to adapt and alter learning resources to meet the needs of their constituents. Third, the practical skill development orientation of the materials attracted the attention of other audiences. The leaders of the social sector, representing non-governmental (NGO) and community based (CBO) organisations, also found them useful in meeting some of their own staff development needs.

In response to the social sector's use of the Elected Leadership materials and their frequent requests for training assistance, Habitat's Local Leadership and Management Training Programme convened a select group of NGO/CBO leaders from 15 countries in Sub-Sahara Africa (23-28 November 1998) to advise Habitat on their training needs. They were joined by a number of local government managers from Kenya since one re-occurring theme in NGO/CBO leadership and managerial effectiveness deals specifically with their relationships with local governments. The participants to this work session, convened in Nakuru, Kenya, reached consensus on what they believed to be the management development needs of their organisations. These were subsequently translated into detailed curriculum development outlines for consideration under future funding opportunities.

More than a year prior to the Nakuru workshop, the Steering Committee of the Regional Programme for Capacity Building in Governance and Local Leadership for East and Central European Countries identified participatory planning and conflict management as two of their top priority training needs. While the constituents in this particular programme are primarily local governments, the training needs they identified coincided with some of the training needs identified by the NGO/CBO institutions participating in the capacity building strategy workshop in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Since UNCHS works with all these institutions, it made sense to combine the two efforts. Consequently, two of the manuals in this series are funded in large part by the Open Society Institute's Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative with assistance from the Government of the Netherlands working through UNCHS.

### ***Making democracy work at the local level***

The manner in which the development of these learning materials has unfolded highlights several trends that are taking place worldwide. First, the possibilities for actually achieving local self-governing status around the world have never been better. The top-down, authoritarian governments in a large part of the world quickly collapsed after several decades of mismanagement and deceit. With their demise came opportunities for citizens to re-establish local self-governments to control the destiny of the physical place they called home. The Partners Romania initiative to build local government capacity through training is recognition of these shifts in the political landscape of these regions. It also recognises the importance of linking local governments and community based institutions (NGOs/CBOs) in efforts to secure local self-governance processes and democratic values.

In other parts of the world, where local governments often exist on paper but central governments essentially control the process by denying access to resources, citizens have become restive, even angry. Increasingly, citizens are demanding a greater and more potent voice and influence in the way their communities function. Central governments have been loosening their grip on the governing process in recognition of their failures to deliver promises and under increasing pressure to restore power and resources to local governments and their networks of community based institutions. Non-governmental and community based organisations have been effective advocates in efforts to restore

the local self-governing process in many regions of the world. This project is recognition of the symbiotic relationship that often exists between local government institutions and the collective NGO/CBO networks at the community level.

### ***The intended audience***

It should be clear by now that the intended audience for these learning materials is diverse. Obviously, it includes the initial target NGO/CBO institutions and those individuals serving in leadership and management roles. Much of what is included in this series of manuals can also meet the training needs of local government elected and appointed officials and their professional and technical personnel.

There is an important intermediary audience that we want to focus on for a moment. It is the network of training providers who serve local governments and community organisations. These include designated local government training institutes, NGO umbrella support institutions, local NGOs or CBOs who see their roles as providing capacity building experiences for others, private sector training organisations, and, of course, individual trainers and consultants.

Our message to this collective audience of potential users is to be creative in the use of the materials and the identification of learning opportunities to serve the primary constituents outlined above. While training materials, such as these, are seen as the basic building blocks for designing and delivering skill workshops, their potential is much greater. For example, the Participatory Planning and Conflict Management manuals are designed to facilitate planned change efforts in the community. Other manuals in the series can become effective tools for helping NGO and CBO leaders implement organisation development programmes. And, the creative trainer/consultant will see the series as a comprehensive set of tools she can use in many different ways to structure interventions at various levels of the community to meet client needs.

Finally, the series has been borne out of concern from grassroots organisations and leaders that their ability to serve the community is directly tied to their continuing commitment to learn. Equally important is the recognition that NGOs, CBOs and local governments have a responsibility to help others learn as well. The management literature is full of references to *learning organisations*. We urge all of you who partake of the information and ideas put forth in this series to think about the opportunities and responsibilities you have to create *learning communities*. Start by creating opportunities to use these training materials with management teams, neighbourhood action groups, fledgling non-governmental organisations, and individual citizens who want to become more effective in serving their community.

## **ABOUT THIS MANUAL**

This manual is rich in user possibilities. Here are just a few examples of how these planning tools might be used to increase collaboration and participation within organisations and communities and among various groups or individuals within a community such as local governments, NGOs, CBOs, their leaders, staff, and citizen constituents.

- Training local government and NGO/CBO staff members to be more effective in working across organisational boundaries in shared leadership situations.
- Helping staff members in larger organisations develop knowledge and skills in providing staff consulting services of a facilitative nature to operating units within the organisation.
- Facilitating visioning and strategic planning endeavours at the request of local governments and other organisations such as operating NGOs and CBOs.
- Providing assistance to tactical planning groups that have been assigned program or crisis planning tasks by local government councils or large NGOs.
- Managing large community based dialogues about critical issues that are tearing apart the social and economic fabric of the society.
- Facilitating inter-organisational or intergovernmental work sessions on issues, opportunities, problems, or concerns that cut across institutional and jurisdictional boundaries.

**Part I** not only includes a detailed look at the participatory planning process as it has evolved over time but provides insights and strategies for implementing the process in your community. In addition, Part One suggest you stop from time to time to reflect on what you have been reading, and how you might use the ideas gained to improve the quality of life in your community. It's the literary equivalent of stopping along the road to smell the flowers.

Quite a rich storehouse of participatory planning resources, isn't it? Rather than dally any longer, we suggest you did write in and enjoy what we hope will be an enlightening and productive journey of discovery and service.

**Part II** is presented in two parts. **Component 1** includes a few training design ideas and exercises in case you want to organise and conduct a more traditional learning event. For example, you might want to conduct a short workshop to introduce the concepts and ideas of participatory planning to local government and community leaders. Or brief trainers and facilitators on how to use the materials to design and facilitate a participatory planning process working with a planning team assembled by local leaders. These facilitated work sessions could focus on either the development of a long-range strategic plan for the community or an action plan to address a more immediate problem within the community. Many of the tools in Component 2 will also be useful to use in these types of training programs.

It was evident from the field test of these materials in Romania that a training of trainers program focusing on skill development in the various phases of participatory planning and using a classroom case study approach, is not very effective. The planning tools are most effective when applied to a real problem or opportunity working with those who have the direct responsibility to develop a plan based on participatory methods.

Given the lessons learned from the field test of the draft materials, Component 2 includes exercises and worksheets to be used during a participatory planning process based on a real need and real people (not that trainers aren't real, but hopefully you get the picture). These tools are presented in the sequence that they are discussed in **Part 1** of this manual. However, we will alert you one more time that facilitating a participatory planning process will be a *voyage of discovery* requiring you on occasions to take a side road or double back and retrace territory already covered.

Participatory planning tools are also effective management training resources. Planning is a major management responsibility involving decision making and problem solving. So, be inventive and figure out how you can use these tools to expand your services as a trainer or to use them in a myriad of ways that doesn't even mention the words *participatory* or *planning* in the title of the workshop or the consulting service you are providing.

Just remember, this is a voyage of discovery!

### ***Consider this a voyage of discovery***

We like to think of learning as a *voyage of discovery*. Like all voyages this one will take you into new territories. From time to time we will be suggesting you take certain detours to make this *Voyage* more productive and enjoyable based on your individual perspective and needs. Or, you might decide to skip part of the journey because you've been there before. That's perfectly alright with us. After all, we prefer not to have bored passengers on board.

To help to get the most from this voyage of discovery, we will from time to time issue *Travel Advisories*. These are intended to alert you to certain conditions we know about from the experience of field testing the materials and getting advice from many individuals who helped in the final production of this and other manuals in the series. We hope you will enjoy this voyage of discovery.

**And last but not least, many thanks to all participants who put their signatures below and attended the Training of Trainers Programme in June 2000, to field test the manuals. (see hard copy)**

Fred Fisher

## **CHAPTER 1 PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATORY PLANNING**

Coming together is a beginning;  
Staying together is progress;  
Working together is success.

**ARAB PROVERB**

(If you don't understand what Travel Advisories are, go back to the previous page where it is explained!) This chapter is largely historical and somewhat theoretical. It may be of less interest to those of you who want to get to those chapters that are more action oriented. Feel free to skip to Chapter Two. Or, read the Key Points at the end of the chapter in case your boss or some other authority figure is inclined to test your thoroughness in reading this material.

There is a revolution, of sorts, going on in the development world. It concerns *participatory planning* along with other aspects of participation. This grass-roots revolution involves those who profess to help others develop socially, economically and politically, and those who are recipients of development assistance. Robert Chambers, one of the icons of the development era, states:

*From the 1950s through the 1960s and 1970s, in the prevailing orthodoxies of development, it was the professionals who had the answers...poor and local people had the problem, and much of the problem was to be solved by education and the transfer of technology. Increasingly, that ideology has been questioned and undermined. The balance has shifted. Development imposed from the top down was often not sustained. More and more we have been recognised as much of the problem, and their participation as the key to sustainability and many of the solutions.*<sup>1</sup>

Chambers goes on to say that participation has become a major theme in development. He claims it is the new orthodoxy in the World Bank, although one can read a good deal of scepticism into this and other statements he makes about the Bank's real commitment and contribution to authentic participatory development. In spite of all the noise being generated about participation, Chambers reminds us that "as usual with concepts, which gain currency, rhetoric has run far, far ahead of understanding, let alone practice".<sup>2</sup>

We think this is true as well of all the acronyms that have emerged in recent years to describe the various approaches used by practitioners of participation. In 1994, twenty nine different approaches were identified as having been developed since the 1970s. Principal among them is a process called *participatory reflection and action* (PRA) which the authors admit, is an amalgamation of methods, techniques and behaviours. Others with participation in one form or another in their title are PALM, LPP, PAO, PAR, PORP, and PSA, not to mention another PRA meaning *participatory rural/relaxed appraisal*.<sup>3</sup> All this, of course, raises the question: Does the world need another manual on "participatory planning?" We will get to that question a bit later. For now, let's review the new wave of processes washing onto the shores of unsuspecting countries worldwide.

### **A brief look at PRA**

Since PRA, as in *participatory reflection and action* is given frontrunner status by many in this field, we will look briefly at its origin philosophically and conceptually and what it embraces in practice. According to its major proponent, PRA has deep historical roots. They include such developmental fields of endeavour as action-reflection research, applied anthropology, action science, and agro-ecosystems analysis. At the forefront among those who have contributed to the PRA approach is Paulo Freire with his practice and experience of *conscientisation* in Latin America. Freire believed poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality. This approach to adult education, although it sounds rather prosaic, was threatening enough to the Brazilian dictators in power at the time to have Freire banned from his own country.<sup>4</sup>

We would be remiss if we didn't mention one of the major contributors to the current zeal for participatory action-reflection research, Kurt Lewin. His pioneering efforts in these methodologies date back to the 1940s, creating the conceptual and research base for much of what has happened since. What made Lewin's work so relevant was his integration of democratic leadership, group dynamics, experiential learning, action research and open systems theory during the 1930-40s in efforts to overcome racial and ethnic injustices. Of course, earlier contributions were made to *participatory research methodologies* by other pioneers (e.g., Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford). Unfortunately, it is impossible in this short document to recognise all those who blazed the trail for new schools of contributors and practitioners, such as those associated with "participatory reflection and action" (PRA).

### **PRA principles**

PRA by 1996 was being practised, in one form or another, in about 100 countries and was the conceptual home for over thirty PRA-related networks. Summarising the principles and practices of PRA is not a simple task. True to his commitment to think and work "outside the box," Chambers often speaks in metaphors and similes. The principles of PRA, as summarised by the initiator of the process, are:

- **Handing over the stick (or pen or chalk):** facilitating investigation, analysis, presentation and learning by local people themselves, so they generate and own the outcomes and also learn.
- **Self-critical awareness:** facilitators continuously and critically examine their own behaviour.
- **Personal responsibility:** taking responsibility for what is done rather than relying, for instance, on the authority of manuals or on rigid rules.
- **Sharing:** which involves the wide range of techniques now available, from chatting across the fence to photocopies and e-mail.<sup>5</sup>

### **Some typical PRA methods and approaches**

The first method, outlined by Chambers, mirrors the first principle, *handing over the stick*. Others include:

- **Do-it-yourself:** local people as experts and teachers, and outsiders as novices



- *Local analysis of secondary sources*
- *Mapping and modelling*
- *Time lines and trend and change analysis*
- *Seasonal calendars*
- *Daily time-use analysis*
- *Institutional diagramming*
- *Matrix scoring and ranking*
- *Shared presentations and analysis, and*
- *Participatory planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring.*<sup>6</sup>

PRA is effective, according to its practitioners, because of some fundamental reversals involving shifts of orientation, activity and relationships away from past professional practices. These include: from closed to open; from measuring to comparing; from individual to group; from verbal to visual; from higher to lower; from reserve and frustration to rapport and fun.<sup>7</sup>

In an attempt to summarise the key points from a compilation of over ten in-depth case studies from four continents on PRA-type approaches to participation, James Blackburn, editor of the collection, said:

*Participation is more a set of principles than an ideology, an ethic more than a model... deep down, participation is about learning to respect and listen to the opinions, feelings, and knowledge of those we have in the past 'targeted'; being transparent regarding our intentions to intervene in their lives...being careful to decentralise and delegate, allowing the less powerful to manage greater resources and assume more responsibility; sharing our knowledge and expertise... in short, it is about opening up, taking risks and showing trust. Such changes do not come easy to those weighted down with the baggage of long years of formal education and hierarchical cultures.*<sup>8</sup>

### **Reflection time**

Take a few moments now to reflect on the discussion about PRA (participatory reflection and action). As you were reading about PRA, what thoughts came to mind? How would you describe it to a friend who has never been involved in any kind of participatory process? Jot down those words you believe would best help you describe the PRA process to your friend.

We plan to ask you from time to time to stop reading for a few moments and carry out two short tasks to: (1) reflect on what you have just read; and, (2) jot down a few notes on how it relates to your own experience. We call these *reflective cul-de-sacs*, places where you can pull over, stop for a while and think about the part of the journey you have just completed.

PRA, and the family of participatory approaches it has spawned, are largely about the process of *letting go*. They are about letting go of the power and authority associated with top-down technical assistance. They are about letting go of closed systems for planning and allocating resources. They are about letting go of justifying future projects and programs on suspect quantitative data that largely justifies past actions and, as Blackburn has suggested, they are about “opening up, taking risks and showing trust.”

### **The World Bank and participation**

The World Bank entered late into the participation fray. In 1990, they created an organisation-wide Learning Group on Participatory Development to manage a process of consultation, research and workshops. These interrelated activities

resulted in a policy statement on participation (1994) and a series of reports. It was hardly a risk-taking, learning-by-doing, let's-get-on-with-it approach to an issue that had been burning a hole in its reputation.

According to a World Bank report on their experience in participation, it has ranged from: (1) taking a back seat in a government-led initiative; (2) building on previous or existing initiatives undertaken by the borrowing government; to (3) actively pursuing and insisting on the use of participatory approaches. In one case study cited to confirm its active involvement, the Bank staff organised special meetings with stakeholders, held meetings during missions with affected communities, and supervised the resettlement of residents in the affected areas.<sup>9</sup>

In fairness to the World Bank, many aid agencies find it difficult to share power and raise the level of political awareness and strength as explicit project objectives. It is part of the enduring paradox of aid agencies. They exert influence and control power with their resources while deep down they confess a desire to build local capacity and participation. It's like stirring water and oil. At the time it's happening, there seems to be reasonable compatibility. When the stirring stops, the predictable happens.<sup>10</sup>

There appears to be some distance between the World Bank's principles and practices involving participation and those who work in the field, largely unhampered by Bank norms and operating procedures. World Bank policy makers, who operate from headquarters, are often convinced that greater attention to and implementation of participatory planning principles and strategies can be beneficial. For example, such participatory efforts should increase internal rates of return on revenue producing projects and assure greater compliance of loan repayments by beneficiaries if they participate in project planning and decision making. From the perspective of task managers working in the field, such participation can be time-consuming, can often be flawed by political interference and cronyism, and can provide little immediate proof that it leads to higher performance in either financial transactions or public service. The truth no doubt lies somewhere in between.

Increasingly, larger multilateral donors, including the World Bank, are experimenting with "pre-investment packages". These include a one-year pilot phase subsequent to the feasibility study and prior to the large-scale loan. A grant is made by the Bank for diverse stakeholders to develop, test and enhance participatory processes of planning and budgeting. (For more about the Bank's work on participation, see *World Bank Participation Sourcebook*. IBRD: Washington, 1996)

### ***Gender and participation***

Those who write about participation from a gender perspective are not always positive in their assessment of the results from participatory technology. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in the areas of gender and participation. Gujit and Shah, two of the most active researchers in the field, contend that a focus on gender helps overcome some of the paradoxes of participation.

The use of the term "participation" conceals divergent views about its aims and practices, according to Gujit and Shah. They contend that participation in many programs and projects is ill defined and meaningless. Too often it is used to describe a rudimentary consultation between project staff and community members. Like a Trojan Horse, it can hide manipulation and even coercion under a cloak of social palatability.

The recent attention to gender issues has resulted in a growing involvement of gender specialists in participatory development. This is a positive step for participation in general because it focuses attention on the need for more flexible and content-oriented approaches to planning.

In summarising the key phases of externally initiated participatory processes in development, Gujit and Shah see the early 1990s as the age of the "participation imperative." It was during this period that funding agencies began demanding that participatory processes become a condition for funding. While these pre-conditions have sparked positive contributions, the authors contend "there was little consensus about what constitutes good quality work."

The term *paradox* seems to seep into any serious discussion of participation and development. Gujit and Shah describe the situation at the present time as the *paradoxes of participation*. The first paradox involves the standardisation of approaches, which contradicts one of the aims of participation: to move away from the limitations of blueprint planning in search of more flexible and context-oriented methodologies. The second paradox is preoccupation with the technical rather than the empowerment-oriented use of participatory methods. The focus on gender issues, Gujit and Shah contend, is helping to overcome these two contradictions.<sup>11</sup>

A stronger gender focus involves women and men on an equal basis. To achieve this, women are empowered through identifying their priorities and plans. Men are involved in the same way, but also respect the women's position. As a result women's priorities become central to participatory planning.

## ***NGOs, CBOs and participation***

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) more traditionally have been in the forefront of participatory processes and over the years have been supported in a variety of ways by a myriad of national and international organisations including the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). In many ways, their proliferation can be attributed to the perceived notion that they represent the high ground in a process that is sullied by politics and power. Collectively, the NGO/CBO family of institutions has contributed substantially to the development process, particularly in terms of participatory dialogue and action.

Collectively, they represent a very wide mix of values, motives, institutional frameworks, missions, sizes, levels of influence and ability to deliver programs and services. Their ranks swell world-wide by the minute, sparked by idealism, new opportunities to serve, frustration about the way other institutions fail to deliver promises and mandates, and on rare occasion, greed. In the family of third sector organisations, there are, unfortunately, a few charlatans and many that are incompetent. These disparaging words are not meant to denigrate the roles and contributions of NGOs and CBOs but to strike a note of realism and caution.

In the transition states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), non-governmental organisations have filled an important void as many central and local governments have been slow to foster democratic values and create means for citizens to be heard and involved. The Open Society Institute, under the leadership of George Soros, has been bold and expansive in its financial, intellectual and program commitments to bring about change in these regions of the world. Partners for Democratic Change, another international NGO with a particular focus in CEE countries, has built a network of country affiliates committed to advancing civil society and a culture of change and conflict management.

In Latin America, Sub-Sahara Africa and many parts of Asia, NGOs and CBOs have exercised strong national and local leadership, engaging in a wide range of participatory initiatives. Their efforts run the gamut from filling gaps in the social and economic safety nets for their citizens to paving the way for representative democracy. For many poor and disadvantaged people, these institutions have represented the only real hope for getting their needs addressed.

Some would argue the involvement of NGOs in participation has been in some ways akin to the role of the welfare worker. They have represented their clients (citizens) rather effectively, thus keeping both citizens and local governments from facing off directly on the front line. As a recent publication by Habitat International Coalition freely admits, participation “has been the traditionally recognised role of NGOs, especially in projects assisted by international agencies.”<sup>12</sup>

## ***UNCHS (Habitat): Bridging the gap***

Missing from the discussion thus far is the role of central and local governments and the inter-relationships between the public and popular or third sectors. UNCHS (Habitat) has contributed significantly to the efforts of local governments to enable community initiative and has gone far to “bridge the gap” between public management practice and popular action. With credibility in both camps, it has been successful in helping highlight the need for more collaboration between third sector and local government and providing models and support for cross-fertilisation.

Since 1984, UNCHS (Habitat) has executed a range of operational applied research activities through the Community Development Programme, Localising Agenda 21 Programme, the Women and Habitat Programme (WHP), and the Settlement Improvement and Environment Programme (SIEP).

The recently concluded Community Development Programme (CDP) has been operational in Africa, Asia and Latin America in over sixty settlements and municipalities. CDP “bridges the gap” by adopting a three-fold approach to community-based participatory planning. First, it works with central governments to put into practice national policies that facilitate community action. National legislation on popular participation gives people the right to organise, form CBOs, negotiate with the public sector, and use public resources. National decentralisation programs strengthen local governments and give them incentives to work with NGOs and CBOs. Second, CDP works with local governments to change the attitudes of civil servants about low-income households and their organisations. Sensitisation efforts are complemented by the development and testing of financial, legal and administrative practices that allow local governments to co-plan, co-finance and co-manage settlement improvements together with CBOs. Third, CDP works directly with CBOs and their associations to increase the capacity of people to participate effectively. This includes community management skills in organising, problem identification and prioritisation, resource mobilisation, negotiation, conflict resolution, management, maintenance, monitoring, and evaluation.

In its Localising Agenda 21 Programme, UNCHS (Habitat) has been encouraging participation across the entire spectrum of community stakeholders. Working initially in six secondary cities in three regions of the world, the programme engages citizen groups, civic organisations and local governments in a four-stage approach to capacity building. Each step in the process is based on participatory methods. They include: awareness building and strategy

development (reaching consensus on action priorities); human resource development and institutional strengthening; the development of planning and management tools; and, promoting public dialogue through dissemination and exchange.

### ***The private sector and participation***

Robert Hargrove has worked for years helping corporations and other private sector organisations move toward new modes of management and operation. He makes an interesting observation about collaboration as a societal trend. “To step into the future,” Hargrove says, “we must shift our weight to the opposite foot.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say that society has in the past seen extraordinary individuals as the source of significant and lasting human achievement. He predicts the source of future human achievement will not be attributed to extraordinary individuals but to extraordinary combinations of people. These combinations might include people who are already considered by their peers to be extraordinary. They also might include ordinary people who discover their own capacity to be extraordinary in the process of working together. We can’t help but be impressed with Hargrove’s simple metaphorical analogy as we think about how to mobilise local groups of ordinary citizens and local public servants to take on extraordinarily difficult and important tasks within their communities.

Hargrove’s observations are reinforced by two management consultants working in South Africa although they enlarge the tent of participation to include a much wider audience. McLagan and Nel have compiled a convincing set of data and experience to anchor their premise that *participative governance* is one of the major issues of our times. Participative governance occurs when those who are not a part of a system that makes decisions on their behalf become a part of the decision making process based on their ability to contribute. It is beginning to affect all areas of our lives: education, business, community organisations, even families, and, of course, governments. What’s most impressive and important to this discussion is their review of current research into what is generally described as high-performing organisations. Most of their examples are from the private sector although both authors have worked with NGOs and public institutions during their careers.

In their compilation of findings from more than ten major research studies in several countries, including more than 2,000 organisations in a wide range of businesses, one conclusion was very clear. The work practices that lead to high performance are participative practices. In other words, authentic participation leads to high performance. It’s a focus we hope not to lose as we shift our attention to some tools for enhancing participatory planning between local governments, civic organisations and citizens.

The high performance/participatory practices that McLagan and Nel found in their survey of major research findings came about in two interesting ways. First, those organisations striving for higher performance often achieved success by discarding outmoded policies, personnel programs, values and managerial behaviours that were largely described as being authoritarian. These include rigid control structures, hierarchies of authority and power, restricted access to information, systematic efforts to strip the power of lower level workers, and low tolerance for ambiguity and mistakes.

Conversely, the participative work practices they found contributing to high performance within the organisations researched include:

- work relationships based in interdependent needs and respect, not hierarchy of power and influence
- systematic efforts to develop competency throughout the organisation, not just at the top, by encouraging and rewarding career development and learning on the job
- shared decision making at all levels of the organisation ranging from participation in defining the corporation’s strategic objectives to worker authority on the shop floor to close down operations when something goes wrong
- performance criteria and control systems that are internal and self-generated, not imposed from outside
- transparency and accountability (qualities we often associate with public institutions), and
- access to information, people, and resources.<sup>14</sup>

When these changes are compared to those being promoted by PRA and other participatory development approaches mentioned earlier, they are remarkably similar. Yet, they differ in one important way. It is rare to see *higher performance* as an explicit goal in participatory development.

### ***Participation is never easy***

The experience with public participation in the United States has gone through some difficult times since the early 1960s. Fortunately, it has come out of the thicket, not necessarily unscathed, but certainly wiser for the experience. The

civil rights movement in the United States during the middle decades of the twentieth century was born out of a horrific pattern of discrimination against racial minorities, primarily African-Americans. With the civil rights movement came sweeping changes in legislation, initially from the central government. These policy stands were backed by a whole range of rewards and penalties that were designed to bring state (sub-national) governments into line with the national mandate.

Public participation was required on the part of local governments to qualify for federal grants designed to bring about more social and economic equity between the races. Local government officials and citizens alike soon discovered that effective public participation processes are a learned behaviour. And, at times, the lessons learned were painful. Many public officials were loath to share decision-making powers with citizens. After all, they were elected because of their political skills and acceptance by the majority of those voting - ignoring, of course, that many African-Americans were denied access to the ballot box in those dark days - or hired by local governments because of their technical expertise. Suddenly, citizens, often poor and not well educated - conditions over which they had little control - were questioning the authority and expertise of elected and appointed leaders. As a result, the participation process, largely mandated within the implementation of federal grant programs, became mired in controversy.

Over time, local government officials, elected and appointed, began to recognise the importance of and benefits to be gained by engaging citizens in authentic participatory planning processes. They also became more skilful and confident in their own abilities to work with citizens in collaborative ways. Those local governments and communities that were successful in forging effective local partnerships caught the attention of the National Civic League (NCL) which, subsequently decided to document the results. NCL is a national NGO devoted to promoting and engaging in civic initiatives.

### ***What makes for successful collaboration (participation)***

The NCL, collaborating with others, conducted a major research effort in the early 1990's to determine why some communities were more successful than others in working effectively across political, social and economic boundaries. Their research included over fifty in-depth studies of successful community collaborations. According to the NCL findings, these are the things that must be present or deliberately built into the process from the beginning in order for collaboration to succeed:

- ***Good timing and clear need.*** Are the stakeholders ready to collaborate and is there a sense of urgency about working together?
- ***Strong stakeholder groups.*** Are they credible, well organised, and able to effectively represent their interests?
- ***Broad-based involvement.*** Are all the important sectors concerned with the issue being addressed represented as contrasted with a few, predominately from one sector? Are women as well as men involved at all levels? Are their priorities listened to and incorporated into decision?
- ***Credibility and openness of process.*** Do all the stakeholders see the process as fair including shared decision making, the process open to all not just a rubber stamping activity by a dominant party, and governed by agreed-upon procedures that assure these qualities of mutual engagement?
- ***Commitment and/or involvement of high level, visible leaders.*** If the mayor, for example, can't be involved, does she send a representative with decision-making authority? Are the citizens or civic society organisations putting forth their best representatives for participation?
- ***Support or acquiescence of "established" authorities or powers.*** Have key institutions or power blocs - for example, the city council, chamber of commerce, local NGOs, minority groups - agreed to support and abide by recommendations arrived at through the collaborative process?
- ***Overcoming mistrust and scepticism.*** Have efforts been made early on to deal with these issues and to overcome them?
- ***Strong leadership of the process.*** Has the process of collaboration been managed effectively? Some examples of this key role are: keeping stakeholders at the table through periods of frustration and scepticism; acknowledging small successes along the way, helping stakeholders negotiate difficult points, and, enforcing group norms and ground rules.
- ***Interim successes.*** Have intermediate successes been achieved, built on, acknowledged and celebrated to provide encouragement and sustainability?

- *A shift to broader concerns.* Are the participants in the process focusing less on narrow, parochial interests and more on the broader interests of the community as they mature in their efforts to work together? <sup>15</sup>

### ***Lessons learned by UN-Habitat on the road to participation***

UNCHS (Habitat) has had many experiences over the years in using participatory planning (PP) approaches. These efforts have cut across cultures, regions and sectoral challenges. A quick look at the lessons learned, through both the Local Agenda 21 and Community Management Programmes, reveal certain truisms.

- External interventions based on establishing participatory planning and implementation activities must necessarily start with where the local institutions and leaders are, not where you would like them to be, in terms of commitment to participation and the knowledge and skills to collaborate successfully.
- Awareness raising initiatives and management training are essential early inputs to the PP process. They need to be targeted to the level of participant education and experience to be successful. Or, as described by one country programme, training was “non-formal, unorthodox, demand driven, on-the-job, context oriented, non-classroom, non-lecture, facilitative and participatory.”
- Contrary to what might be assumed, high level communication is essential when you work from the grassroots up. What those at the apex of power don’t know about your efforts to get others to participate, could very well bring suspicion and unfortunate sanctions to your endeavours.
- On the other hand, monitoring and challenging questions from national officials when they have a stake in the outcome can do much to bring rigour to locally defined and implemented endeavours.
- Specific capacity-building efforts are likely to be needed to improve the collaborative skills of local government elected officials and staff as well as those of local development NGOs, CBOs and other partners.
- While community-based planning activities would suggest it is unnecessary to keep records or put in place formal reporting procedures and monitoring and evaluation systems (“after all, we all know each other”), it’s not true.
- Participatory planning at the local level is largely an act in institutional and personal capacity building. This needs to be recognised and dealt with accordingly. The successes achieved over time will depend on the foundations built and secured early in the collaborative process.

### ***What keeps collaboration from happening (or being successful when it does happen)?***

As we said earlier, achieving effective participation by and with citizens is rarely easy. Even when local governments reach out to citizens, they are often reluctant to get involved. The following are some of the reasons why citizens may not want to participate:

- They have been denied access to the political process in the past and are wary about getting involved.
- They have no real interest or connection to the issues that arise to the top of the political agenda. The issues they are asked to make a contribution to through some process of citizen participation simply don’t reflect their needs or interests.
- Their faith in how decisions get made has been shaken by past efforts to engage with public officials in shared leadership and decision-making activities. The power brokers always have the final say.
- Citizens often do not know how to participate in public dialogues and decision-making processes. Which suggests that participation or collaboration is a learned behaviour. This also applies to many elected and appointed officials.

Here is a quick look at how participatory planning often looks from the perspective of the public official. Involving citizens in a participatory planning process can be time consuming and therefore costly. Public officials often feel they have been given the mandate to make decisions on behalf of citizens. Creating opportunities for citizens to get involved, they believe, undermines these mandates.

Professional and technical specialists, such as planners and engineers, believe citizen collaboration can jeopardise their professional and technical judgements and standards. It is not uncommon for local governments that adopt strong and positive citizen engagement policies and strategies to have professional staff judgements overridden on such issues as land use planning and provision of basic services. The challenge is to provide a forum where all points of view can be

expressed and assessed against community needs and visions, short-term and long-range. Participatory planning processes will only be effective over time if they are conducted in an open and honest way and in the best interest of the total community. We will return to these issues toward the end of this chapter, so stay tuned.

### **Reflection time**

Before continuing, take a short reflective break. First, write down what you believe the words participation and collaboration mean, based on your own experience and perspective.

Fine! Here's one more task we would like you to complete before moving on. Review the list of criteria NCL says should be present for the process of collaboration to succeed. (They can be found on pages 11 and 12.) Pick the two or three you feel are most important and jot down why you think they are more important than the others. Give some thought to how difficult they might be to implement in your community, based in part on the discussion of why collaboration doesn't always work.

The collaborative experiences researched and dissected by the NCL reveal many key values, behaviours, and skills required of those who plan to enter into a participatory planning process. We will be returning to these key characteristics and many of the other lessons learned from this grand tour of participatory ventures, adventures and, on occasion, misadventures. Before we do, we feel obliged to clear up any confusion we might have caused by the use of our language. After all, we've been a bit casual about the use of key terms such as participation, participatory, collaboration, not to mention *PLANNING!*

### **A stroll through lexicon valley**

The key words in our discussion thus far have many meanings. They remind us of the story of the blind men and the elephant. The blind men describe the elephant as a rope, wall, or pillar depending on the part they have been able to feel. When it comes to participating, collaborating and planning, we often suffer the same distortions of reality. How we define these fuzzy terms depends on our life experiences, roles and status. Our personal filters often cloud the way we define reality. Let's see what others have to say about the words and phrases we will be using often in this manual.

#### **Re: participation**

**Participation:** a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, can exercise influence over policy formulation, design alternatives, investment choices, management, and monitoring of development interventions in the communities. (The World Bank, Discussion Paper # 183: *Participatory Development and the World Bank*, 1992, p. 2)

**Participation:** a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over decisions and resources that affect their lives. (Alan Fowler, *Striking a Balance*, 1997, p. 16)

**Participation:** a way of viewing the world and acting in it... a commitment to help create the conditions which will lead to a significant empowerment of those who at present have little control over the forces that condition their lives. (James Blackburn and Jeremy Holland, *Who Changes?* 1998, p.3)

**Participation:** an empowering process which enables local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain in confidence, and to make their own decisions. (Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development*, 1995, p.30)

**Participation:** about who decides and why. (David Carnevale, *Trustworthy Government*, 1995, p.76)

To these we would like to add our own definition:

**Participation:** the process of decision making and problem solving, involving individuals and groups who represent diverse interests, expertise and points of view and who act for the good of all those affected by the decisions they make and the actions that follow.

In trying to craft an all-embracing description of participation, we soon learn it is not an easy task. There seems to be general consensus that participation is a process that leads to decisions by a group of individuals who have contributions to make to the issue being discussed. However, those defining the process bring their own perspectives and biases about what is important. So be it with our approach to the process. In the context of these learning materials, we will be focusing on participatory events between local governments, civic organisations like NGOs and CBOs, and citizens who are not involved in organised efforts.

We now shift our attention to another set of terms that are becoming more commonly used to describe joint actions.

#### **Re: collaboration**

**Collaboration:** a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results. (David Chrislip and Carl Larson, *Collaborative Leadership* 1994, p.5).

**Collaboration:** doing something together. Robert Hargrove, *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration*, 1998, p. 3. Hargrove follows this pithy definition by an interesting analogy. He reminds us that certain species of birds by collaborating with each other create lift that carries them twice as far as they could fly if travelling alone. It's a good analogy since it not only describes an act of participation, it also defines the level of performance that results from it.

Collaboration has a bad connotation in many parts of the world where it is associated with devious relationships between those individuals with police powers and informers. This is unfortunate because collaboration is gaining credibility as a tool for bringing together diverse sets of stakeholders (e.g., different levels of government, public and private enterprises, and organisations) who can benefit from pooling resources to achieve commonly defined goals. Participatory planning, by contrast, suggests a method of decision making that happens largely between local governments and their citizens. Given the frequent use of these two terms to describe relationship processes between various sectors of the society, we prefer not to split hairs about what each of them means.

#### **Re: planning**

**Planning:** a process concerned with the conscious evaluation of interrelated decisions and policies prior to undertaking action. Guy Benveniste, *The Politics of Expertise*, 1972, p. 34)

**Planning:** a process by which scientific and technical knowledge is joined to organised action. (John Friedmann, *Retracking America*, 1973, p. 246)

**Planning:** the enterprise of facilitating decisions and making them more realistic and rational. (Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry*, 1964, p. 403)

The term *planning* when used alone seems almost meaningless. Actually, it is very meaningful. But few recognise planning for what it is – decision making. When plans are made, decisions are made as well. They may not be implemented, but decisions are made. And, the act of planning usually has to do with the allocation of resources.

The term *planning* becomes much more specific when we attach a qualifier to it, such as participatory, comprehensive, strategic, action, five-year, or development, to name those most in keeping with our experience. Only when we add the qualifying term does the word planning have clarity of purpose.

Since planning as the other half of our focused discussion can be interpreted in so many ways, depending on our experience, it's worth a few moments of our time. For many, the term *planning* is synonymous with government sponsored and controlled five-year development plans. These plans, born from the bowels of a distant bureaucracy charged with producing such documents, were largely mechanisms for allocating scarce resources to long term physical and social investments. These periodic *grand plans* were typically formalistic, even ritualistic, statements of global intent that, more often than not, had little to do with day-to-day operations or current reality. They were based largely on predictions and forecasts. This approach to planning will sound familiar to those working and living in what has become known euphemistically as countries in transition or transformation.

Countries outside the boundaries of those in transition engaged in similar activities. But, more often, planning was conducted at sub-national levels of governance. The planning outputs were called master or comprehensive plans. These plans often were pre-conditions for gaining access to national funding allocated for specific kinds of projects and programs. These allocative planning processes were largely top-down decision making processes dominated by elected officials, urban managers and planners.

National multiyear plans and their counterpart master plans, depending on the part of the world from which they emanated, didn't work very well for a number of reasons. They reflected the thinking of a few select individuals who had access to formalised power and decision making or who possessed the knowledge and skills associated with the



planning profession. Their “plans” were, more often than not, static statements of future intent. As a result, these plans often became barriers to the process of managing public decision making in dynamic and rapidly changing economic, social, political, and physical environments.

Moreover, the creation of these long-range plans rarely involved the participation of those who would be most affected by their implementation. Citizens remained for all practical purposes outside the circle of public planners and decision-makers. This exclusivity denied to planners and decision-makers the potential power of wider understanding and ownership of the plans by those who would be affected, the citizens.

John Friedman, an urban planner of note, has said, “the process of societal guidance (a fancy term for planning) is too important to be left entirely to experts.” He says the planning process must reach down into the schools, farms, factories, offices, and neighbourhoods to draw an increasing number of people into a direct engagement with their society.<sup>16</sup> In other words, those who profess to plan must engage an ever-expanding circle of others in the planning or decision making process.

There is another distinctive aspect to the kind of participatory planning process we are talking about. It is the pro-active notion that planning is a management tool designed to address issues, problems and opportunities in an on-going process of community building. Participatory planning is a fluid, organic-like process that redefines its boundaries quickly and easily based on the needs of the environment it is serving. More importantly, planning involves putting together action plans that are realistic and can be quickly implemented. In other words, plans are not made in a vacuum. Moreover, there is an underlying belief that planning is decision-making and that decisions reached through a process of participatory planning are “owned” by those who help make them. In other words, participatory processes enhance the chance of implementation. When we talk about planning in these terms we are referring to participatory planning.

### ***The ladder of participation***

We want to take you on a short journey into the past, to the 1960s and the United States, a country that was in turmoil over the role of citizens as participants in community processes. Sherry Arnstein, who was working at the time for an NGO called *Studies for the Commons*, wrote an article about the heated controversy that was raging in the streets of most inner cities. She described various approaches to citizen participation as steps on a metaphorical ladder. Her descriptions helped to shed light on the various approaches being used to implement citizen participation at the time, some praiseworthy and others a bit unsavoury. Since this manual endorses the concepts and strategies of *participatory planning*, which has the potential of clinging to all rungs of Arnstein’s citizen participation ladder, we thought it important to share her insights with you.

*The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it’s good for you. Participation of the governed in his or her government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy - a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everybody. The applause is reduced to polite handclaps, however, when the have-not blacks, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos, and whites advocate this principle. And when the have-nots define participation as redistribution of power, the American consensus on the fundamental principle explodes into many shades of outright racial, ethnic, ideological, and political opposition.*<sup>17</sup>

In many ways Arnstein’s comments are contemporary. They fit the mold and mood of many countries around the world. The conceptual framework she constructs for us is insightful and critical to our collective understanding of the participation process. *Citizen participation is citizen power.* “It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future.”<sup>18</sup>

The Arnstein ladder has eight rungs, starting at the bottom with the rung of *manipulation* and topped off with the rung of *citizen control*. Let’s look briefly at each rung in an effort to better understand how diverse, and at times destructive, the process of citizen participation can be.

The bottom rungs in Arnstein’s ladder are (1) *manipulation* and (2) *therapy*. These rungs describe levels of “non-participation.” Their real objective is keep citizens from participating in planning and conducting programs, while power holders are enabled to “educate” and “cure” the participants. One example is putting the have-nots - we will use Arnstein’s term for identification purposes - on advisory committees as a means of using them for public relations purposes. Another is providing “training” to help the have-nots overcome environmental living conditions associated with poverty, construed as “mental problems.”

The next two levels of participation on her ladder are (3) *informing* and (4) *consultation*. Arnstein sees these citizen participation activities as mere tokenism. Examples include meetings where citizens are informed of some action that will directly affect their lifestyles or environment. The communication is usually one way with no feedback or negotiation opportunities, formal, intimidating and often late so little can be done to affect the decision from above. Consultation is only slightly more legitimate in Arnstein’s progressive ladder of participatory schemes. While this can

be a legitimate method of getting information from the citizens, there is no assurance the information will be acted upon. The popular means of consultation include attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public hearings. Moving up, Rung (5) is designated as *placation*, a slightly higher level of tokenism in Arnstein's taxonomy of climbing schemes. Often at this level, the have-nots are given greater opportunities to advise but still no power to back up their expertise. Do you feel yourself wanting to take issue with these techniques since they feel so "legitimate" in our own schemes of engaging citizens in participatory events?

The final three rungs lay out strategies for sharing power. They are (6) *partnership* (7) *delegated power* and (8) *citizen control*. In the top two rungs, have-not citizens gain control through majority rule on policy and managerial boards or full managerial power. *Question*: Does this put the haves into the have-not arena? If so, does this lead to manipulation and other means of non-participation?

In some ways, the Arnstein discussion is dated. Her comments are gender blind, generationally insensitive, void of racial nuances, and unassuming in terms of ethnic diversity and its potential for political rage.

The challenge for many of us is to accept and update the Arnstein ladder as an approximation of the real world we live in when it comes to opening the community to greater participation. The lower rungs on the ladder are reminders of situations we all have known either directly or through stories of efforts to engage in non-participatory participation. Those who have lived in authoritarian states certainly recognise them for what they are, or more accurately, for what they are not. For all of us, equal participation of women as well as men has to be built in.

Arnstein's ladder is certainly provocative, taking the more subtle nuances of participation, breaking them into big chunks, and throwing them into our collective faces for consideration. As she readily confides, the real world is designed to splinter these rungs into dozens of mini-rungs of less sharp and pure distinctions. And, she says, we are left to trot up and down the ladder to mix and match participatory processes that meet the needs of both those in power and those who aspire to become less powerless.

This is a good time to stop and consider the messages behind the rungs and their uses in the process of civic engagement between local governments, civic organisations and citizens.

### **Reflection time**

Which of these rungs can you identify with, based on your experience in various forms of *citizen participation*? Record them in the space below and make a few notes about the circumstances.

### **In summary**

We have taken a short historical journey to acquaint you with some of the more recent, and not so recent, events in the bridge-building process we are calling participatory planning. We have also tried to elaborate on the terms we are using by bringing you other perspectives about their meaning.

In Chapter 2 we will look at characteristics and qualities that make participatory planning a unique and potentially valuable tool for defining and achieving common goals and objectives. We will divide our discussion into three parts. The first will focus on qualities that define the nature of the process, including a look at the concept of social capital followed by more commonly traded benchmarks of democratic progress (i.e., *inclusion, openness, accountability*). The second part will look at skills and behaviours associated with effective participatory planning. The third part will describe briefly the various phases of participatory planning that we will recommend for your consideration (i.e., *diagnosis, planning, implementation*).

### **Key points**

- Participatory planning has a rich and often controversial history of engagement within communities around the world.
- The process has been described by many individuals and movements in many ways, thus resulting in considerable enlightenment or much confusion on the part of the reader, depending on one's level of tolerance for ambiguity.
- Participatory planning has captured the attention of world wide institutions such as the World Bank and UN (Habitat), and of frustrated citizens who want to be involved in making decisions that will affect their daily lives.

- There is sufficient evidence and documentation about what makes for successful participation. Nevertheless, the rules of engagement that make the most sense are those that are discovered when local governments, community institutions and citizens come together to work together
- Not all participation is necessary, or necessarily participatory. It's a process that can be and has been abused and misused.
- Given these caveats, it is nevertheless a tool of great power and considerable consequence. For those organisations and individuals that treat participatory planning with respect and apply it within the expected mandates of openness and accountability, they will be rewarded with better decisions and a shared commitment to actually implement what they have planned.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Blackburn, James with Jeremy Holland (eds.). **“Who changes? Institutionalising participation in development”**. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Cornwall, A., I. Gujit and A. Welbourn. **“Acknowledging process: challenges for agricultural research and extension methodology”**. *Beyond Farmer First: Rural People's Knowledge, Agricultural Research and Extension Practice*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd., 1994, pp. 98-117.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, Robert. **“Whose Reality Counts, Putting the First Last”**. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd., 1997, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-154.

<sup>8</sup> Blackburn, *op. Cit.*, p.170.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken (ed.). **“Participation in Practice”**. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1996, pp. 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Nici Nelson and Susan Wright (eds. ). **“Power and Participatory Development”**, London: Intermediate Technology Publications, Ltd., 1997, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> Gujit, Irene and Meera Kaul Shah. **“Waking Up to Power, Conflict and Process”**. *The Myth of Community, Gender Issues in Participatory Development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> **“Building the City with the People”**. Mexico City: Habitat International Coalition, 1997, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Hargrove, Robert. **“Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration”**. New York: Business Week Books, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> McLagan, Patricia and Christo Nel. **“The Age of Participation”**. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995, pp. 29-68.

<sup>15</sup> Chislip, David D. and Carl E. Larson. **“Collaborative Leadership, How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference”**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 1994, pp. 51- 4.

<sup>16</sup> Friedmann, John. **“Retracking America”**, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1973, p. xvii.

<sup>17</sup> Arnstein, Sherry, **“A Ladder of Citizen Participation”**, *American Institute of Planners Journal*, July 1969, p. 216.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

# ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

If anything is certain, it is that change is certain;  
world we are planning for today, will not exist in this form tomorrow

**PHILIP CROSBY**

Thus far, we have reviewed a bit of the history of participatory planning, explored numerous concepts and models, discussed the roles and biases of various kinds of players in the process, and raised a few warning flags about the use and sometime abuse of participatory planning as a strategy involving social, economic, environmental and organisational change. The quick survey revealed a wide range of values, techniques and principles as well as suggestions on how to work more effectively in collaborative activities and who to involve in the process. With this in mind, our main task in this chapter is to amplify many of the points made and add a few new ones.

We will begin with an umbrella concept and strategy known as *social capital* and then look at some fundamental principles we believe should provide the value base and working foundation for any efforts to engage in participatory planning. These are effective communication, shared leadership and teamwork. [Tied closely to the principles of participatory planning is the belief that local governments must be considered as an integral part of any participatory planning process that takes place within the community.]

When the need for this manual was discussed on two very different continents, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, there was separate and reconfirming agreement that NGOs, CBOs and local governments should work together in planning various kinds of change interventions within their collective communities. Given this mandate, we have assumed that local governments will be active and willing planning partners. We have also included a short discussion about the unique roles and responsibilities of local governments as community based institutions.

### **Social capital**

Participatory planning is a process usually designed to address a specific issue, opportunity or problem with the intent of resolving or exploiting it successfully through the collaborative efforts of the crucial stakeholders. This means getting very specific about what is done, to what extent, by whom, for what purpose. While these utilitarian characteristics will be the usual parameters to work within, we want to suggest a larger, somewhat complex framework within which to locate participatory planning: *social capital*.

Social capital is a term created by Robert Putnam to describe the “features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.”<sup>1</sup> Robert Putnam conducted extensive field research in Italy to determine the importance of “civic community” in developing successful institutions. When Italy created new governments for each region in 1970, Putnam and his collaborators spent two decades analysing the efficacy of these new governments in relation to a range of social and economic concerns. Their research revealed patterns of association, trust and cooperation that facilitated good governance and economic prosperity.

Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive. When participatory planning is successful - achieving certain end results that would not have been attainable in its absence - it contributes to a community’s social capital. For example, when two or more local governments join together to create a facility that can serve their collective needs more efficiently than what they might create working alone, it adds to the region’s social capital.

While participatory planning can add to the social capital of the community or region, these kinds of participatory (collaborative) processes can benefit and be facilitated by the accumulation of social capital. They are synergistic processes that feed and support each other. For example, one of the authors lives in a rural area of Pennsylvania that is served by volunteer fire organisations. These local bodies have mutual aid pacts which means they are in constant communication and come to each other’s aid when they experience a disaster too difficult to manage on their own. This means that one volunteer organisation can specialise in responding to a certain type of disaster while other departments in the mutual aid agreement can specialise in others. This way they optimise their individual department’s capital investments while increasing their collective social capital to work together.

As James Coleman reminds us, “a group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking in trustworthiness and trust.”<sup>2</sup> Coleman continues, “The more extensively persons call on one another for aid, the greater will be the quantity of social capital generated”. Conversely, “social relationships die out if not maintained; expectations and obligations wither over time; and norms depend on regular communication.”<sup>3</sup> To use the fire organisation analogy, the more they call on others to assist them and respond when called upon to provide needed service in return, the greater their own trustworthiness and trust in others.

## ***Issues of trust, norms of reciprocity and civic engagement***

Trust and trustworthiness are terms that evoke strong emotions in many parts of the world, where so much trust has been damaged or destroyed at the individual, family, community and higher levels of engagement. Trust involves the process of making inferences about the motives of others for acting in a certain way. We use past behaviour and reputations to measure whether we trust someone or some organisation. It also involves predictability and the possibility of risk. The more an organisation and its members are predictable in their actions, in a positive way, of course, the less risk and the more the social capital accumulates as they participate with each other.

Social trust evolves from a complex set of variables. Of these, two are critical: *norms of reciprocity and networks of civil engagement*. Norms of reciprocity can be looked at in two ways: balanced or specific exchanges, the simultaneous exchange of items of relatively equal value. The most obvious at the personal level is the exchange of gifts between individuals. Most of these are based on expectations that the other person will reciprocate within certain parameters.

The more important kind of reciprocity, from the perspective of building social capital, is what Putnam calls “generalised reciprocity – a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or imbalanced, but involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be paid in the future.”<sup>4</sup> This norm, according to Putnam, is a highly productive component of social capital. Communities that engage in these norms of generalised reciprocity can more effectively restrain opportunism on the part of individuals and groups and resolve problems that require collective action.

Let’s look again at the volunteer fire organisations. Not only do they cooperate with each other within predefined areas of coverage but they are often perceived as being an integral part of the local governance system. Although they perform a valuable public service as a civic organisation, they must rely on local government for access to critical public domain resources, e.g., access to fire hydrants on public right of ways, traffic control, and on occasion, capital funds for major investments. Often these generalised reciprocal agreements are informal, based on years of experience and trust. Nevertheless, the lines between volunteer fire service organisations and local governments are carefully guarded by both parties. They are conscious of their individual domains and recognise the importance of preserving their independence.

In Kenya, far from the network of volunteer fire personnel that characterise rural Pennsylvania, is another unique and culturally appropriate example of how communities build social capital. It’s called the *Harambee*. In its original form, it was a means of raising money at the community level to assist in a variety of worthy causes. These causes might be very personal, such as helping with funeral expenses being incurred by a destitute family or raising money to help a young, promising member of the community pursue a university education. Harambees are also social events that bring community members together providing the glue of civility and generalised reciprocity. Unfortunately, political corruption and exploitation have tainted the Harambee in recent years. What generations of civil engagement have been able to establish, in terms of social capital in many Kenyan communities, has been torn asunder by political malice and greed. Trust and trustworthiness, essential to the social capital accumulation process, have been undermined and in many cases destroyed.

Putnam says that networks of civil engagement enhance the potential for establishing and maintaining effective norms of generalised reciprocity. In the case of volunteer fire departments, those networks include:

- auxiliary associations, often organised and operated by the spouses of fire fighters
- routine social events which involve the larger community and are used to raise funds and support
- infrequent but anticipated major events that call attention to the reciprocal relationships that exist between them and the community (i.e., parades and carnivals), and
- participation in other networks, such as sport leagues and service organisations, that maintains social relationships between the fire fighters and other citizens.

All these inter-related activities foster the accumulation of social capital and demonstrate the importance of networks of engagement and norms of reciprocity. For those who cannot relate to the volunteer fire department analogy, think in terms of the many neighbourhood associations, sports clubs, church groups, choral societies and other organised activities that comprise networks of engagement within your community.

Unfortunately, there is a potential down side to these networks of engagement and norms of reciprocity. Ethnic confrontation, gender-based domination, and other types of community-based conflict are often built on exclusionary networks of engagement, although we would hardly refer to them as pillars of a civil society. Nevertheless, the rules

that govern these exclusionary networks of engagement have many of the same characteristics as those Putnam and others contend are critical to the accumulation of social capital.

### ***Participatory planning as a process for building social capital***

In spite of its inherent dark side, the principles and practices that underlie the notion of social capital are important to the process of participatory planning. Or, as the sub-title suggests, participatory planning is important as a process for accumulating social capital. Its contribution can be calculated in at least three ways.

- Participatory planning endeavours are among the raw ingredients that add over time to the accumulation of social capital. Productive interchanges between and among local governments, civic organisations and citizens are like bank deposits that build capital and generate interest.
- Participatory planning activities, when successful, model positive norms of reciprocity and create new networks of civic engagement. According to Putnam and others, these are important sources of social trust which foster the environment necessary to build social capital.
- Participatory planning ventures, by consciously building on the base of social capital within the locality, can secure the institutions of local self-governance and democracy in those places where they are shaky, and strengthen them where they are already secured.

This last point deserves a bit of elaboration. Some would argue that in societies where public institutions are trusted and trustworthy in return and citizens believe the democratic process really works, these very attributes argue against the need for more citizen participation. In other words, the system works, citizens are well represented, and everyone knows how energy and time consuming participatory planning can be. If the situation changes (given this line of logic), it's time to vote the elected representatives out of office. Effective local self-governance systems and well functioning democracies do not override the need for participatory engagement. Rather, they are strengthened and enriched through various means of citizen involvement.

As Putnam reminds us in a sobering assessment of his enthusiasm for these complex ventures, "building social capital will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work."<sup>5</sup> Speaking of democracy, let's consider the unique role and resources that local governments bring to the table as partners in the participatory planning process.

### ***Local governments, unique institutions***

It may seem obvious, but local governments are unique institutions. They represent all the citizens within their legislated geographic domain. We recognise that there are many citizens who would question the precise meaning of this statement based on the performance of many local governments. Of course, one of the redeeming features of democratic, local self-governing systems, if they are working as intended, is the ability of the electorate to vote out the rascals who are not representing their interests.

Local governments, because of their legal mandate or legitimacy to represent all citizens, potentially have substantial leverage in working with other levels of government and with all sectors of the community. They have the authority to convene meetings and to establish policies and laws designed to achieve a broad range of locality-based goals. Local governments possess an institutional memory, not only in records, maps and other documents, but also in the continuity of staff and officials who are often able to reach back into their collective experience and dredge up valuable information and insights. One of the authors worked with a very experienced city engineer, eighty four years old, who was able to recall a situation that saved the city a lot of money and overcame a privileged injustice doled out in earlier times.

Local governments often have the mandate to raise revenue, manage local public finances and use the local budget to achieve short-term program goals and long term community investments. The financial management mandate provides the opportunity to make community choices and to back participatory planning with the necessary resources to implement the plans. In many countries, local governments can obligate future fiscal resources through long term debts to build public facilities that are needed immediately.

Local governments represent continuity, stability, experience and competencies that are often invaluable to the participatory planning process. They are the instruments that take the results from many participatory planning endeavours and assure their implementation over time. Equally important, local governments command and manage major physical resources such as streets, buildings, public easements, and much more.

Local governments are institutions that can, if so motivated, maintain, sustain and strengthen *the culture of democracy* within the community. What is meant by *culture of democracy*? To a large extent, it is shared expectations about how citizens behave toward each other and what they expect from local government officials and staff. The culture of

democracy defines norms of behaviour that assure civility among citizens and script the unwritten rules we take for granted in our daily interactions with our neighbours and our local governing institutions.

In terms of this discussion, we assume the culture of democracy will be energised and strengthened through acts of citizen participation and engagement in the affairs of their community. Over time, these civic acts will translate into social capital. And social capital, in turn, will define the quality of life within the community. In this rich tapestry of local self-governance, social capital and quality of life issues, we have assumed a vibrant civic presence that engages with local governments in a wide range of dialogues and action planning activities. In other words, participatory planning.

### ***Principles of effective participatory planning***

The participatory planning process, if it is to become a permanent and valuable fixture in the life of the community, must be grounded in a set of agreed upon and guiding principles. Among those we believe to be most important to the PP process are diversity, equity, openness, accountability, and transparency, all of which are sub-components of civic trust. Let's look briefly at these basic principles of participatory planning.

***Diversity.*** While a thorough stakeholder analysis should cut across the diversity of individuals and groups who need to be involved in a specific participatory planning process, it is never safe to assume the net is being cast sufficiently wide. When considering diversity, issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and age are the ones that come quickly to mind or should. But the need for diversity goes much deeper when we are considering those who can contribute to a participatory planning process. What about differences in social status within the community, diversity associated with geographic location, levels of economic well being, life and work experience, political affiliation, and those who are known to think differently about the issue under consideration? Contributions from these unique perspectives, as well as those just mentioned, may be important to achieving the goals of the participatory planning venture.

***Equity.*** This principle cuts across the diversity concern by injecting into the decision process such issues as *how much* and *how many*. One advocate of participatory development (a trend and focus discussed in Chapter 1) suggests that it means equal inclusion of all sections of a typically stratified community.<sup>6</sup> This may be somewhat useful within the broader perspective of participatory development, but it could cause instant chaos if applied to the participatory planning process. Nevertheless, equity of representation, greater access to the tools of power and influence, and other essential criteria of fairness and representation cannot be ignored when planning for participatory planning.

***Openness and transparency.*** These two principles of participatory engagement have a lot in common. Transparency involves the degree to which the process of participation is communicated openly to others outside the process and open to external scrutiny. No secrets, no hidden agendas, no cover-ups, no backroom deal making: these are the essence of transparency. Transparency is achieved by sharing information and ideas willingly and promptly. Openness, from our perspective, is somewhat different. It has to do with a process that incorporates divergent insights and ideas, is in touch with those beyond the membership boundaries of the participating team, encourages their input and is open to expansion of membership as dictated by evolving needs and interests.

***Accountability.*** This principle is associated with responsibility which in turn is tied to authority to act. With institutions like local governments, the connections between these particular variables should be clear, if the organisation takes transparency seriously. If we are to hold those who are engaged in participatory planning activities accountable for the actions they take, they must have both the authority and responsibility for taking action. Responsibility without authority can be a trap. Unfortunately, some local government officials use the participatory process as window dressing, neither giving authority nor assigning responsibility to those involved. This results in masking authoritarian decisions with the guise of public participation. When this happens, it is difficult to find who is accountable, but not too hard to find scapegoats. They turn out to be those who are held accountable without responsibility or authority to act.

***Trust.*** When we are successful in implementing these principles effectively, we will have done much to strengthen and secure the public's trust. Most individuals enter into a participatory process loaded down with untested assumptions about the motives, integrity, predictability, and credibility of those with whom they will be participating. The level of trust they are able to achieve with each other and with those who created the opportunity to participate will dictate the quality of their interactions and the results they achieve.

These principles suggest a high level of standards and performance for those who engage in the participatory planning process. Nevertheless, we believe they are important to the long-term sustainability of planning processes that involve a rich mix of civic institutions, individual citizens and local governments. One way to gauge the potential for success in carrying out a participatory planning process is to take a look at how your local government fares when assessed against these principles.

You could also change the wording of the following assessment questionnaire to apply to major civic institutions (NGOs and CBOs) that are involved in participatory planning ventures.

### **How principled is your local government?**

#### **Reflection time**

The principles that provide guidance to participatory planning endeavours are also important principles of local self-governance. Take a few moments and assess your local government’s achievements in terms of these principles, using the score sheet that follows.

- 1 = never an important principle
- 2 = only important when it serves personal and “political” needs
- 3 = sometimes considered important
- 4 = often considered as an important principle
- 5 = always important and an integral part of our local self-governance

*Based on the performance of my local government, here is how I would rate its concern and response regarding the following principles:*

• <b>Diversity</b> of involvement	1	2	3	4	5
• <b>Equity</b> in allocating and using public resources	1	2	3	4	5
• <b>Transparency</b> in actions and communication	1	2	3	4	5
• <b>Openness</b> to new ideas and different points of view	1	2	3	4	5
• <b>Accountable</b> in carrying out policies and actions	1	2	3	4	5
• <b>Being trusted</b> by the citizens	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total score:</b>					

If your total score is between 24 and 30, express your appreciation to the local elected officials. If it’s between 15 and 24, it’s time to organise an effort to help them be more accountable regarding these principles. If your score is below 15, it’s time to vote the scoundrels out of office.

### **Communication, shared leadership and teamwork: Core skills in the participatory planning process**

A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single person contemplates it bearing within them the image of a cathedral  
**ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY**

We have looked at some of the characteristics and qualities that make participatory planning a unique and potentially valuable tool for defining and achieving common goals and objectives. We considered the concept of social capital and how it fosters and secures democratic ideals and values. Or, if you want to turn those two interrelated conceptual frameworks on their heads, you could make an equally strong argument that democratic ideals and values, when secured in a society, foster and build what Putnam and others refer to as social capital. Now we want to focus on some specific organisation and personal skills and behaviours that are needed to conduct successful participatory planning interventions. They are effective communications, shared leadership and teamwork.

#### **1. Communications**

This is such a large subject that we could spend the remainder of the manual discussing it. For example, we could cover various ways local governments can communicate to increase citizen awareness and participation. These include, among others, public hearings, citizen opinion surveys, neighbourhood offices, public information strategies, and focus group meetings. But, our intent here is to focus on the process of participatory planning, i.e., face to face engagement of local government officials, civic organisation representatives and members, and citizens and communication skills that will help this process of decision making and problem solving be more effective.

Two skills come to mind immediately. Active listening is one. Asking the right kinds of questions is another. Both of these skills are implied in something called the Johari Window, but it doesn’t deal with the interpersonal skill aspect of



communication. Given this limitation on the part of Johari, let's look briefly at how to be more effective in asking questions and listening actively.

### **Active listening**

God gave us two ears and one mouth  
and we should use them in the same proportion  
**IRISH PROVERB**

Not listening, or more accurately not hearing, according to consultant Mike Robson, is the single biggest reason why members of groups don't work well together. Since there is no way to know for certain what someone else means when they are speaking to us, it is easy to make wrong assumptions.<sup>7</sup> Distracted by other things going on in our lives, prone to form premature judgements about what is being said, and preoccupied with what we are going to say when we get the chance, we don't really "hear" the other person. Next time you are introduced to a stranger, you might want to test your own attentiveness as a listener by, ten minutes later, attempting to recall the person's name. If you have forgotten the name, ask yourself what else you may have missed during the conversation.

Mary Walsh suggests developing four "active" listening habits that can help us respond to other people who want to feel heard and be understood.<sup>8</sup>

**Listen without being judgmental.** It is important to recognise that we all have feelings about what is being said and who is saying it in any conversation. Be aware of them, but set them aside and listen for insight to the other person's point of view. You will have the opportunity to express your own point of view soon enough.

**Identify and acknowledge feelings.** Be alert to the other person's depth of feeling about the topic being discussed. Body language, tone of voice and use of language all provide important clues to the person's feelings. Show your understanding and acceptance of these feelings (empathy) with your body language (eyes, nodding of head, and verbal expressions (hmmm, uh-huh). Tell the person that you understand the feelings. Say things like, "I realise how frustrating this must be for you." Empathetic expressions like these can let the person know she has been heard and create a climate for dealing with the situation more effectively.

**Paraphrase.** Repeating what has been said in your own words has several benefits. First, it makes it necessary for you to pay close attention to what is being said. Second, it demonstrates to the other person that you are really listening and gives her a chance to make her points as clear as possible.

**Ask clarifying questions.** Sometimes the meaning of something said in conversation is not clear. Rather than let it go by, this is an opportunity for you as an "active" listener to ask a clarifying question (e.g., could you tell me more... or could you explain what actually happened...). These kinds of questions can generate additional facts or opinions and sometimes prevent misunderstandings.

**Asking Questions.** As Mary Walsh reminds us, asking the right kind of questions is often associated with the art of *active listening*. We use them to deepen the information already being conveyed, to prevent misunderstanding, or to refocus the conversation when it starts to stray. The most frequently discussed questions in terms of fostering more effective communication are the open and closed varieties. **Open-ended questions** prompt exploration. Closed questions result in a "yes" or "no" response. The way these questions are asked is often subtle. For example, the often-asked question, "Can you say more about that?" is closed. To open it, we only need to ask, "What else can you tell me about that?"

"Do you think we have any options?" Obviously closed. Better to ask, "What options do you think we have?" Open-ended questions result in more and relevant information. They also keep the conversation going.

**Probing questions** are the other most frequently discussed type of query associated with effective communication. These are the kind we use when we want to deepen the conversation and get more clarity and details about the topic being discussed. They go something like this:

"What do you think was behind the Mayor's reluctance to get involved?"

"Why do you think the Chairperson closed the meeting early?"

"Hmmm. That's an interesting point you just made. When did you feel most vulnerable in working with this client?"

There are a few other types of questions that are rarely discussed in terms of effective communications, and they deserve a bit of recognition. Be forewarned! Not all are helpful. **First, the leading question.** They sound something like this: "As mayor, have you thought about being more responsible in working with the NGOs in the community?" What

this person is really saying is: “**You** should be more responsible in working with the NGOs in the community.” Leading questions, more often than not, are designed to make a statement. They rarely move the dialogue to a higher level of meaning and understanding.

**The non-question question:** We hear these all the time during group discussions. For example, “May I ask a question?” In most instances, the person asking for permission immediately asks the question he or she had in mind in the first place, before the person with whom they sought sanction to query has a chance to answer. They aren’t necessarily disruptive or dysfunctional, more just a waste of time. They also say something about the person’s level of comfort as a member of the group.

There are also **friendly questions and hostile questions**, and questions we can’t quite figure out whether they are meant to be friendly or unfriendly. For example, a simple question like, “What do you mean by that comment?” could be an innocent and straightforward inquiry for more information. It could be a probing and supportive question to help each other understand the topic under discussion. Or, it could be, “**WHAT** do **YOU** mean by **THAT** comment?” and come across in a very hostile way. The tone of voice, the body language and the inflections that are put into the query, although using the same words, will turn a simple and friendly question into what will be interpreted as a personal attack.

The **rhetorical question** is an effective way to get others to think about alternatives. “What if…” questions often help us keep our options open in efforts to engage in significant decision making and problem solving. “What if” questions help us to think outside the box, to set aside the traps of conventional wisdom.

**Reflective questions** don’t really look like questions when they are put on paper. It’s the way they are said that makes the difference. They are ways to restate what the other person has said in an effort to increase both their understanding and ours. Reflective questions often sound like this:

“You believe the major problem in meeting the goals set earlier is the lack of qualified personnel?”

“So, you feel you’re in a no-win situation with your boss on this issue?”

The challenge in asking reflective questions is to use your voice inflections to indicate that a response, either confirming what you said or providing more clarification, is expected from the other person.

We have explored, albeit briefly, the intriguing and often confusing art of asking questions. Questions can be open or closed, meaning they either take us to another level of inquiry or stop the discussion with their “yes-no-or- maybe” response. Or they are leading questions, the kind manipulative people ask to get the answers they want not the response you want to give. Then there are the non-questions, the kinds of inquiries that no one really expects someone to answer.

We also have many types of questions that can help us to be:

- better listeners by asking reflective questions
- more effective decision makers by asking probing questions, and
- creative problem solvers by engaging in “what if?” exploratory inquiries.

So, don’t hesitate to ask questions when engaging in participatory planning ventures - of course, the right kinds of questions.

Active listening and asking the right kinds of questions are the interpersonal skills that come in handy when engaging in participatory planning activities. What we want to look at now is the patterns of communication between local governments and citizens. In this discussion, the focus is more institutional and less personal. Our vehicle for doing so is the Johari Window.

### **The Johari window**

The *Johari Window* model for looking at communication patterns was discovered by two individuals, Joe and Harry, while they were conducting an interpersonal communication workshop many years ago, thus the “Johari” nomenclature. It is deceptively simple and profoundly effective in helping individuals and groups work more effectively together. The “window” depicts changes in the quality and quantity of information being shared and understood between two individuals or different groups. The critical variables are *giving and receiving feedback*, which expands the amount of information, data, ideas and dialogue exchanged during communication.

The Johari Window has four panes of glass, like many kitchen windows in some parts of the world. However, the dividers between the panes in this unique window are movable, based on the flow of information between, in this case, local governments and citizens. The upper left corner windowpane represents what both local government and citizens

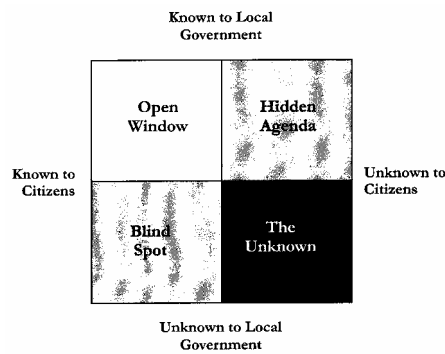
know. This *Open Window* is made of clear and undistorted glass. The communication intent in any participatory planning process would be to expand this open window.

Opposite the open window pane, in our conceptual window of communications is the *Unknown*. This windowpane represents all that is unknown to both parties in their efforts to work together. It is, metaphorically speaking, painted black. The object in communicating between the two parties is to expand the *Open Window* and to scrape away the black paint of the fourth windowpane.

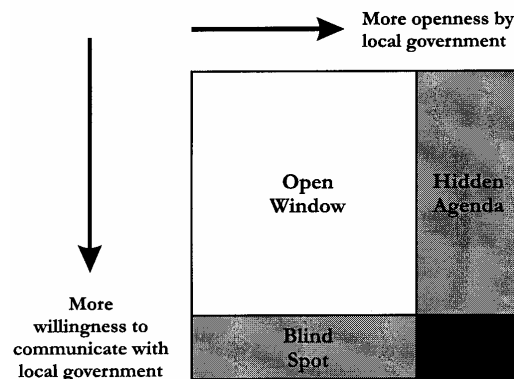
The other two panes in this window of communication represent what local government and citizens know but haven't shared with each other for whatever reason. These panes are made from glass that allows one party to see out but not the other to see in. In the upper right window, the pane labelled *Hidden Agenda*, are all those things local government knows and the citizens don't. While the term "hidden agenda" is value laden and suggests the local government is hiding something from its citizens, this is usually not the case. In the lower left corner are those things the citizens know but aren't telling local government. This is called the *Blind Spot* window.

This window-pane model can be an effective tool in highlighting the state of communication between the various parties who might be involved in a participatory planning process. You could have each party draw its own perceptions of the size of each pane in the window and share this with others. It could be very revealing and establish some benchmarks and goals in terms of communicating. (See Figures 1 and 2 which depict how the window redesign process works).

**Figure 1: Communication model (Johari window)**



**Figure 2: Window redesign (more open communications)**



**2. Shared Leadership**

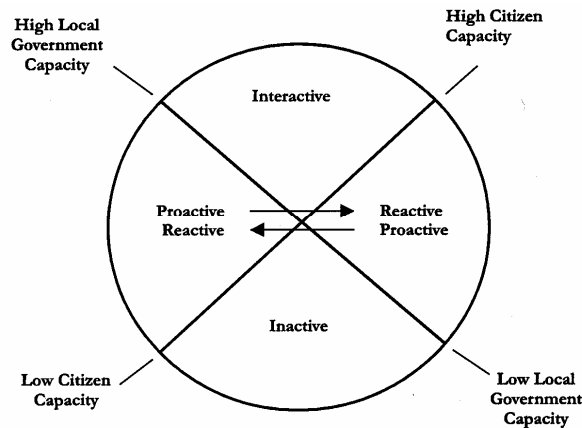
The second essential skill mentioned earlier as important to the participatory planning process is *shared leadership*. This is a concept that is becoming more and more prevalent in management literature which, in turn, reflects a trend in organisations worldwide. The move toward sharing leadership responsibilities, or *empowering others* as it is often referred to, is encouraging for many reasons. Not the least of these, from the perspective of this discussion, is the commitment to and application of democratic principles and practices in non-governmental settings. The presence of democratic values in the community and work places can only strengthen the resolve to assure that our governing institutions behave more democratically in their roles and responsibilities. To tie this notion back into our opening discussion, we believe this trend also has a direct influence on the accumulation of social capital.

The conceptual model of shared leadership we want to acquaint you with looks somewhat like the Johari Window approach to communication. It contains four quadrants of interaction and two variables. Since shared leadership, like the open window of effective communication, involves local government and citizens as the prevailing partners, we need to look at the potential of both to assure that the sharing of decision making and problem solving will work effectively.

The shared leadership model (shown as Figure 3) provides one way to think about the potential of community partners and how they can define the parameters of constructive engagement while working through the participatory planning process. It assumes that any effort by local governments to engage in citizen participation should be based, in large part, on the potential of each party to contribute to the collaboration effort.<sup>9</sup> Given this basic assumption, there are four strategies to pick from:

- **Interactive** - high levels of potential to contribute in both local government and the community which is represented by civic organisations and citizens)
- **Proactive** - high potential in local government and low potential in the community
- **Reactive** - low potential in local government and high potential in the community, and
- **Inactive** - where the potential of each to contribute is assessed as low.

**Figure 3: Shared leadership model**



The pro-active and re-active strategies have corollary relationships, something to keep in mind when using the model. For example, when citizens, through initiatives of their own, take on a community project without the involvement of their local government, the local government and its officials and officers are in a re-active mode. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the role relationships have been communicated as in open window communications and there is no need for local government collaboration. It is an example of empowerment *by* citizens, not empowerment *of* citizens.

Examples of the empowerment *of* citizens by local government sharing leadership roles and responsibilities would fit into two of the strategies. One is the *interactive* strategy where citizens are brought into the decision making process as important resource partners. The other is the *pro-active* strategy. An example of the latter strategy would be local government contracting out a particular human service responsibility to a neighbourhood to build its potential to be more self-reliant over time.

The term *potential* has been used as the qualifier in determining the ability of the two parties to contribute to any proposed collaborative effort. Potential is determined as a combination of:

- **Resources** - human, monetary, and material
- **Direction** - goals and objectives
- **Influence** - the ability to get things done through others, and
- **Energy** - personal and organisational drive to achieve and perform.

Local governments have an added potential: their public mandate to provide leadership, service and direction for all their citizens. To help you decide which of these strategies would be most appropriate in any given situation, we have listed some guidelines or criteria to consider. (See Figure 4) They are *goals, resources, urgency, commitment, and resistance to change*.

### Reflection time

The notion of shared leadership is not always easy for many to accept as a mode of operation, either in local governments, the workplace, or even the family. Stop for a moment and jot down the thoughts that came to mind as you read these ideas about shared leadership

**Figure 4: Criteria for sharing leadership Between Local Governments (LG) and Citizens (C)**

Shared Leadership Styles	Goals	Resources	Urgency	Commitment	Resistance to Change
Interactive	Mutually shared and understood	Both LG and C have resources to address the problem or issue	Time is available to explore sharing of resources and responsibilities	Commitment from both LG and C is necessary if goal is to be achieved	Low in both the LG and community
Proactive	C goals are subordinate to LG	LG has all or most of the resources to address the problem or issue	Speed is important and LG would be adversely affected in achieving goals by delay of exploration	Further commitment from the C is not necessary for goal achievement	Low in the community
Reactive	LG goals are subordinate to C	C has all or most of resources to address the problem or issue OR reliance on C will encourage development of potential / resources	C exhibits need for immediate action and LG will not be adversely affected by following their lead	Further commitment of LG is not necessary to achieve the goal	Low in local government
Inactive	Not clear to either LG or C	Neither have the resources to address the problem or issue	Immediate action is not seen as urgent by either party	Neither LG or C are committed	High in LG and/or C to the degree that action would be adverse to both

### 3. Teamwork

Teamwork is the third skill we identified earlier as being important to implementing participatory planning. Teamwork involves local government officials and citizens working together to achieve mutually defined goals as efficiently and effectively as possible. Teamwork occurs when two or more individuals or organisations join forces for a specific purpose (e.g., to achieve a specific performance objective) that requires coordination, cooperation and collaboration of activities within the team as well as the organisations and people they represent in order to be successful in reaching agreed upon goals and objectives.

Effective teamwork depends on many factors. These factors are related to the task of achieving determined goals and objectives as well as the maintenance of productive interactions among team members. While there are many ways to describe these factors, the following, if adhered to, will make participatory planning an enjoyable and productive experience.

Some of the key characteristics of an effective team are:

- A clear shared sense of direction and purpose
- Enthusiastic, committed team members who are all involved and participate
- A focus on achieving task and goals that are stretching and demanding
- Humour, enjoyment, and learning
- Mutual support among team members who help each other grow and develop individual strengths

- The potential for individuals to be assertive and to challenge and explore issues raised by others in order to generate better solutions
- Good listening skills as well as good questioning skills.<sup>10</sup>

These characteristics are also qualities of living and may strike some as unusual for a manual on participatory planning. For example, they include the ability to express humour, to enjoy and to learn. If you have ever been part of a team where these qualities emerged quickly and naturally, then you understand why they are included and why they are important.

Assertiveness is another curious characteristic. It is accompanied by the notion that team members should challenge each other without the authority to do so. Of course, being assertive is different from being aggressive. The idea here is to be heard and to help others be heard around those things they believe are important.

Effective teams symbolise these wonderful qualities and more. Teams are at their best when their members recognise that together they represent more knowledge, experience, skills and insights than any one of them working alone. The best teams work even harder to see that their efforts reflect not just the sum total of these attributes but much, much more. It's called synergy.

### ***Steps for Empowering Planning Teams***

Those who are responsible for initiating participatory planning teams need to keep the following criteria in mind. Before these teams are set in motion, they need:

- A clear understanding of their responsibilities
- Authority equal to the responsibilities assigned to them
- Standards of excellence that will challenge them to reach their full potential
- Skills and confidence required to meet these standards
- Knowledge and information to make sound, quality decisions
- An expectation that they will be given periodic feedback on their performance
- Knowledge that they are trusted to succeed in their assigned responsibilities
- Assurance that they have freedom to fail, although this is not a preferred goal.

If participatory planning teams are self-anointed or initiated, these criteria are still valid and important. In fact, it may be even more important for teams borne out of community needs and not officially "blessed" by local government leaders to demand these standards in their own efforts to work together.

The following chapters will outline a general framework for conducting a participatory planning process and some useful tools to use as your team progresses from one stage of the process to another. Before moving on, here are some of the key points covered in this chapter.

### ***Key points***

- Participatory planning is a process rich in potential for furthering the quality of life for community members and the personal and professional growth of those who engage in the process
- Effective participatory planning will increase the social capital of the community
- Social capital has been described as the, "features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." Key to the building of social capital are *norms of reciprocity* and *networks of civil engagement*. These are central to the participatory planning process as defined in this discussion
- Key principles of participatory planning are diversity, equity, openness and transparency, accountability and trust.
- Local governments are unique institutions in our democratic societies. They represent valuable resources, competencies and above all, they represent all the citizens of the community. While they may not be directly involved in all participatory planning ventures at the local level, they should be consulted for their contributions and potential membership
- Participatory planning, to be efficient, effective and productive, requires many skills and behaviours from its members. At the top of the list are open and constructive communications, shared leadership, and teamwork.

### ***Endnotes***

<sup>1</sup> Putnam, Robert D. **“Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy”**. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1993, p. 167

<sup>2</sup> Coleman, James S. **“Foundations of Social Theory”**. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 302

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 321

<sup>4</sup> Putnam, *op. Cit.*, p. 172

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185

<sup>6</sup> Welbourn, A. “RRA and the Analysis of Difference,” *Sustainable Agriculture Programme RRA Notes No. 14*. pp. 14-23

<sup>7</sup> Robson, Mike. *Problem Solving in Groups*, 2nd ed. Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing, 1995

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, Mary. *Building Citizen Involvement: Strategies for Local Government*. Washington, DC: International City/County Management Association, 1997

<sup>9</sup> This model is based on the work of Educational Systems and Design, Westport, Connecticut. We want to acknowledge the contribution of ESD and particularly Malcolm Shaw to this discussion

<sup>10</sup> Eales-White, Rupert. *Building Your Team*. London: Kogan-Page, Ltd., 1995, p. 169.

## CHAPTER 3

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

If you play with the fibers, they suggest possibilities  
ANNIE ALBERS, WEAVER

Participatory planning can be a complicated process. This message, no doubt, has become clear in the opening chapters. As you probably noticed, there are many models, probably too many. Theories and strategies abound with conceptual frameworks in all shapes and sizes. Some are fuzzy; others are rigid. Often they represent the bias of the agency or institution that is promoting a certain brand of participatory involvement. Certainly, this endeavour is not value or bias free.

And yet, having written about the process and participated in it as facilitators, trainers of trainers, and members of actual planning teams of many types, we find ourselves learning something new from each experience. Participatory planning really is a *voyage of discovery*, and rediscovery. As we set the stage to help you work through the process in a somewhat logical way, we will be posting *travel advisories* to alert you to certain roadblocks and other distractions that make this process so challenging. Here are a few *travel advisories* that are useful to consider, even before we begin our journey.

Participatory planning is a logical, step by step process? Yes, and no. Yes, there are a series of steps in the process that are linear and require that certain tasks to be done before others. On the other hand, there are times during the process when it doesn't make sense to take step "b" after "a", or "d" before "e". For example, you analyse early in the process who the important stakeholders are who need to be involved. After further definition of the problem, for example, you find out you need additional stakeholders. So, you redo the stakeholder analysis. Or, you are planning a course of action and realise the option you have decided to implement is no longer viable. You may have to go back to a much earlier step to re-define the problem. These detours can be frustrating, perhaps, but it's all a part of the voyage of discovery and achieving sustainable results from your efforts.

Training trainers in this process is best when working with a real live client who wants your help in conducting a strategic plan for the organisation or community or who has a difficult problem that can be solved through the PP process. There are other ways to prepare trainers in this process and we will discuss those in Part Two.

Developing a strategic plan as an integral part of every PP process is not advisable. Strategic planning is like a rich and expensive dessert. It shouldn't be consumed at every PP session. However, *visioning*, which is central to the strategic planning process, may be very useful even when tackling a difficult everyday problem in the neighbourhood. We will spend some time on this ambiguous issue when we get into the discussion of various steps later on.

External facilitators should be used to help conduct the participatory planning process. This is another one of those statements that evokes a variety of "yes-no-maybe" responses. Since facilitation of participatory planning is a key factor in achieving success in many participatory planning processes, we will spend some time helping you decide how to deal with this issue.

Implementing action plans resulting from participatory planning is not the responsibility of those who prepare the action plan. As you might suspect at this point in the discussion, this is another of those problematic issues. While the answer is usually "yes", there are exceptions.

These are just a few of the potential concerns to think about as you plan your PP voyage of discovery. Fortunately, they are easy to resolve with a little prior planning. Yes, it makes sense to *plan* your participatory planning activity so some of these ambiguous concerns can be resolved before they become problematic.

### ***A preview of the PP process***

Participatory planning can involve all the phases and steps outlined in the process, or just a few, depending on the complexity of the problem or opportunity being addressed. We will describe what we believe are the essential phases and steps needed to cover most planning situations and provide some insights about their use. The total PP process will be divided into six phases. Within each of these phases will be a series of specific steps and tasks to be performed.

**Phase I: Initiating the Participatory Planning Process.** This phase involves the "triggering event" that motivates some individual, group or organisation to call for action that could benefit from the participatory planning process. These events are either problems that need to be addressed or opportunities that are unrealised. Problems are usually discovered through awareness while opportunities evolve from individual or shared visions of what is possible. At this point, those proposing the possibility of using a participatory planning process may think about strategic planning as an option, particularly if they have identified a potential opportunity to be pursued.



**Phase II: Building Productive Partnerships:** Participation is about partnering to get things done at the local level. This might involve partnering between the local government, local NGOs or CBOs, and citizens; partnering with other local governments, higher level public institutions, or the private sector; or a combination of some or all of these possibilities. This initial effort to enlarge the circle of visionaries or problem solvers is also the beginning of the use of the stakeholder analysis tool.

This phase also includes the decision about whether or not to use a facilitator of some kind to help conduct the participatory planning process. We will make the assumption that there will be a facilitator used in the process, either one brought in from outside the circle of initiators or someone from within the ranks of the participating parties. Creating a successful working arrangement with facilitators or process consultants is often referred to as “contracting” for their services. This is not the usual legal contracting arrangement but rather a form of *social contracting*.

**Phase III: Reaching Out - or Focusing In?** At this point in the process, we want to discuss the options of engaging in a long-range strategic planning process, what we refer to as *reaching out*, or directing the participatory planning effort toward more immediate problem solving. This *focusing in* option is frequently referred to as “action planning”. Two key skills, either visioning or problem finding are involved in this phase, depending on the objectives to be achieved. Beyond this phase of determining whether the process will be long-range and strategic or short-term and problem-oriented, the process of participatory planning follows similar courses of events although the context is very different.

**Phase IV: Fact-Finding and Analysis.** Depending on the context, either short-term problem solving or long-range visioning, there will be a series of steps to be completed before defining a strategic plan or outlining a detailed course of action. These include: collecting more data, information and ideas; organising and analysing these sources for better understanding of the problem or opportunity; determining the goals and objectives to be achieved; and assessing the feasibility of fulfilling the goals and objectives. This final step includes such tools as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and Force Field Analysis.

**Phase V: Planning a Course of Action.** At this point in the process, those involved will be narrowing the objectives they expect to achieve to a realistic number, determining their best option(s) for achieving them, and probably engaging in a further iteration of the stakeholders required for implementation. This phase of the planning process also involves deciding who will do what with whom within certain resource parameters, including time frames and time commitments, to accomplish their goals and objectives or fulfil their vision. Finally, the team will want to look at the potential consequences of implementing what they will be recommending and to prescribe a monitoring and impact evaluation scheme.

**Phase VI: Implementing Actions, Measuring Impact and Moving On.** This phase of the process is usually outside the direct mandate of the participatory planning team’s responsibilities. Nevertheless, it is important for planning teams to be familiar with implementation issues and concerns. And there are times when many of those who help to plan programs and activities involving coalitions of local government officials and community representatives are also directly involved in their implementation.

### ***Some concluding introductory remarks***

**PP’s non-linear nature.** By describing the PP process in phases, it immediately conjures up the image of a linear procedure that depends on one phase following the other, as described. While this issue was raised earlier in a travel advisory, it bears repeating. The steps are more cyclical than linear, often subject to the need to return to a previous step or phase to “redo” something and at times to skip ahead when the next step or phase in the participatory planning process is not needed. The steps overlap, converge, diverge, concur and interact. Those who are successful in managing this participatory planning process are not bothered by either the need or opportunity to shunt back and forth among the steps or to skip steps when they no longer seem necessary.

**Strategic planning is an option.** Another concern involves strategic planning and how it fits into the PP process. It should not be confused with the need and importance of engaging in shorter, time-bound, action-oriented PP endeavours designed to address a whole range of practical, locality based problems, issues and concerns that can benefit from a wider audience of decision makers and problem solvers. This comment is not meant to deny the importance of strategic planning. Rather, it is designed to put visioning events into perspective.

During the training needs assessment process that preceded the development of these materials, two diverse audiences on two different continents determined at about the same time that participatory planning is a practice and skill worth investing in as a learning opportunity. Representing two different perspectives, local governments and civil society institutions, they saw the need for local institutions to join in productive dialogues about a wide range of problem centered concerns with the mandate to come up with viable options for implementation. Their initial focus was on

action planning with a secondary interest in long-range strategic planning. Nevertheless, both approaches are important and will be covered in the processes outlined in the following chapters.

**Monitoring and evaluation.** The important tasks of monitoring and evaluation always seem to be tacked on to the end of the participatory planning process. We want to emphasise that these two functions are seen as integral to every phase of the PP process. The intent is to assure that planning teams think and act on issues of monitoring and evaluation right from the beginning of their deliberations. They should first monitor and evaluate their own progress, and secondly, build monitoring and impact evaluation into their plans and implementation strategies.

**Communication, shared leadership and teamwork.** These three skills and behaviours were emphasised in the previous chapter. They need to become a part of the culture of participatory planning efforts as this type of planning becomes more common as a resource for decision making and problem solving within local governments and communities.

**Facilitating the Process.** We have made the assumption that the PP process can benefit from being facilitated by an outsider who works with the planning team in a non-partisan, neutral role to help it be more effective and productive. An option is someone with facilitation skills and experience from one of the participating institutions who can temporarily step out of their official role to work with the planning team.

Since facilitation can mean many things, it might help to describe it from the perspective of the participatory planning process outlined in this manual.

*Facilitation is a process in which a person (who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantively neutral, and has no decision making authority) intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to improve the group's effectiveness.*<sup>1</sup>

- Can a local government-citizen group work through the participatory planning process without an outside intervene/facilitator? The answer is, "Yes." However, it will be easier with the external helper.
- Can these skills be learned by a member of the group, or if a member of the group has facilitation skills, can he or she perform in this role? The answers to both are "Yes." However, facilitation skills are learned behaviours. In some situations, facilitator training will be needed. If a group member is already skilled in the facilitation process and is willing to be the facilitator and others in the team agree, he or she would need to step outside the group role to serve effectively as facilitator.

### **Key points**

- Participatory planning is a complicated process. It is linear and sequential, cyclical and organic, fused with ambiguity and contradictions.
- Training people to train others in the PP process is best done with a willing client who has a real need and commitment to involve the organisation and community in participatory planning.
- Strategic planning is an option, not an imperative, when local governments and civic institutions engage in participatory planning.
- Individuals who don't serve on the planning team often implement plans that have been developed through a participatory process. Nevertheless, participatory planning is improved when implementing teams have some representation in the process.
- Participatory planning, as developed and described in this manual, is a six phase process. These phases are not sacred.
- Monitoring, impact evaluation, active and open communication, shared leadership, and teamwork are ubiquitous features in participatory planning efforts that are successful. These qualities border on the sacred.
- Participatory planning ventures are best when facilitated by non-partisan, neutral and caring persons.
- Participatory planning is a voyage of discovery. Enjoy it and learn from it.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Schwarz, Roger. "The Skilled Facilitator". San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, p. 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### PHASE I: INITIATING THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

Gentlemen, we're surrounded by insurmountable opportunities  
**POGO**

Phase I of the participatory planning process involves several distinct events or steps. First, something happens in the locality that one or more individuals believe deserves a collective response. This *something* could be:

- a long standing problem that has become intolerable to an increasing number of concerned citizens, e.g., dirty streets and parks
- a disaster of community-wide proportion just waiting to happen, e.g., illegally dumped toxic wastes that are beginning to seep into the city's water source
- an opportunity to exploit an economic advantage which didn't exist until now, e.g., the completion of a new highway linking the community to a major market area, or
- a formal request by single parents in a low-income neighbourhood to start a new day care centre to support employment opportunities.

Whether it is a problem or opportunity, it becomes the "triggering" event that motivates one or more persons to call for action. They could be local elected officials, city officers and staff, the governing board of a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), the director of a small community-based organisation (CBO), a church group, a neighbourhood club or individual citizens. It is their awareness that a problem exists or their vision that an opportunity is at hand that takes the local government and community to the point where they believe a participatory planning process could be helpful.

Before getting into the techniques and skills required to carry out the participatory planning process, we want to look at some of the human factors, such as motivation and initiative, that bring the triggering event to the attention of the community. This may sound elementary, but many local governments and communities become immune to the complex mix of *problems* and *opportunities* that surround them. For one reason or other, they fail to take action even when they have the resources to do so. We attribute this public malaise, in part, to a lack of *awareness* and *vision* on the part of those individuals who could make a difference.

Of course, there are other reasons as well. There may be a lack of trust in those who hold the reins of governance thus keeping citizens from initiating the change process. At other times, those who have specialised responsibilities for managing development initiatives operate as independent fiefdoms making cross-sector planning and follow-up actions virtually impossible. We will argue, of course, that these shortcomings can be seen as problems - or opportunities - when there is greater awareness of the consequences and a vision of what the future might bring when professionals and politicians learn to cooperate with each other and with citizens.

Participatory planning, whether it is initiated by local government officials, members of a civic organisation such as an NGO or CBO, or by one or more citizens, is precipitated by one of two major human attributes: *awareness* and *vision*. These attributes are, in turn, triggered by two phenomena: *problems* and *opportunities*. Or to put it a bit differently, awareness of problems, either current or pending, and visions of opportunity, when acted upon with deliberation, trigger the participatory planning process. These are important distinctions and we want to pursue them before moving on.

#### **Reflection time**

Stop for a moment or two and write down three problem statements and three opportunity statements that you believe represent the state of your local government or community that could be addressed through some kind of participatory planning process.

Problem Statements

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Opportunity Statements

- 1.

- 2.
- 3.

Thanks. We will ask you to return to these statements later.

### ***Problems and opportunities***

Making decisions and solving problems are two of the most important tasks that participatory planning-initiated groups perform. Seizing opportunities and acting on them, which is also decision making, are two others. There are some significant differences between problems and opportunities and the thought processes required to address them successfully. **Problem solving** is, by its very nature, *reactive*. Someone, either in local government or the community, perceives there is a problem and reacts. *Opportunities* require a *pro-active* approach, reaching out to pursue a course of action that is important but not urgent. Problems are urgent, or they would not be seen as problems. On the other hand, problems are not always important. This may explain why so many go unsolved.

Some other distinctions between problems and opportunities are:

- **Problems** are often oriented toward maintenance (fix it, solve it). By contrast, **opportunities** are focused on something desirable that someone wants to happen.
- **Opportunities** are, nevertheless, problematic. They almost always involve some risk and uncertainty. Is it feasible? Will it work? If it works, will it result in the intended benefits? Will the benefits outweigh the costs? **Problems**, on the other hand, can become more risky and uncertain if they aren't solved.
- **Opportunities** live in the future and the risks must be calculated against a future not always predictable. **Problems** emerge from the past resulting from actions or inactions that have or have not happened. The results of solving problems, or not solving them, is often more predictable. More often than not, today's problems come from yesterday's solutions.
- **Opportunities** require foresight, a vision about what can be. **Problems**, more often than not, require hindsight, determining what went wrong.
- When tapping **opportunities**, the critical question is *What if?* The most important question when solving problems is *Why?*
- When dealing with **problems**, we seek *solutions*. With **opportunities**, the search is for benefits.
- **Opportunities** can be ignored. **Problems**, in most cases, cannot or should not be.
- **Problems** when properly diagnosed in a timely manner can be transformed into **opportunities**. Have you ever noticed how eliminating a **problem** in your life suddenly becomes an **opportunity** to move in a different direction?

### ***Awareness and vision***

Earlier, we mentioned that *awareness* and *vision* are the human attributes that help us discover problems and opportunities. Since they are different thought processes and some of us are better at using one attribute than the other, it is useful to look at them as potential resources to have represented on a participatory planning team.

Both *awareness* and *vision* involve many things:

- ***Insights*** - seeing things that are not obvious to others
- ***Perspective*** - looking at things from different points of view
- ***Intuition*** - hunches from our collective experiences that are lingering somewhere in our subconscious library, and
- ***Increasing our peripheral vision*** - taking off the blinders to widen our scope.

Both of these managerial attributes, *awareness* and *vision*, can benefit from *reflection*. Often it is necessary to reflect on a problem or opportunity, in order to understand and appreciate its many ramifications. Reflection time can often keep us from solving problems that are best unsolved and to forget opportunities that are better forgotten. No doubt, the most

prevalent participatory development strategy that evolved in the 1980s and '90s, Participatory Reflection and Action, was designed with this in mind.

While *awareness* and *vision* ride some common brain waves, they are also quantitatively and qualitatively different as planning tools required to facilitate community changes. Let's see if we can make more sense out of these planning attributes.

- **Awareness** is more *tactical*, a short-range skill. **Vision** has a long-range, strategic quality. These and other personal attributes will be important to keep in mind when assembling a participatory planning team.
- **Awareness** attends to *details*. **Vision** paints the *big picture*.
- **Awareness** often requires *hindsight*, determining what went wrong, and *re-vision*, how can we fix it. **Vision** operates from *foresight*, what's over the horizon, and *en-visioning*, seeing a future that is not yet invented.
- **Awareness** involves *convergent thinking*, focusing in. **Vision** is best achieved when our thoughts *diverge* from the beaten path.
- **Awareness** is enhanced by the *analytical* ability to put two and two together and get four. **Vision** benefits from *conceptual* thinking, taking two and two and putting them together so they equal multiple digits.

Both are important attributes to have represented on a participatory planning team. Since each of us comes equipped with a slightly different mental toolkit, the selection of the PP team should take these differences into consideration. As Peter Block reminds us, *the future, in some ways, is the cause of our current behaviour*.<sup>1</sup> Or, to phrase it somewhat differently, be careful when selecting members of your participatory planning team. If you tend to be egocentric, they may all reflect your own view of the world which, of course, assures there will be few new ideas put on the table to disagree with.

Incidentally, we believe <i>awareness</i> and <i>vision</i> are human behaviours that can be learned
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### ***Participatory planning options***

We just mentioned that **awareness** is more *tactical*, a short-range, problem-solving skill, while **vision** has a long-range, *strategic* quality. We also tied these two personal qualities back into *solving problems* and *capitalising on opportunities* as the triggering events that get us thinking about whether or not to engage in *participatory planning*. While we don't want to be dogmatic about these terms and what they mean, we believe they will help us put the rest of this manual into perspective. (By the way, if these dichotomous categories of problems/opportunities and awareness/vision are bothersome, feel free to create your own conceptual framework.)

From the perspective of this discussion, one of the main challenges of local government and civic organisation leaders is to increase the potential that those who are tapped to participate in collaborative planning processes represent problem solvers and visionaries, not to mention other criteria that will assure a representative and diverse team of planners and decision-makers.

Over time, as local governments and civic institutions make greater use of the participatory planning process, the teams they assemble for different planning tasks should represent the depth and breadth of community leaders and representatives. For example, the teams could include elected and appointed officials from local government, representatives of civic organisations and private businesses, neighbourhood activists and concerned citizens representing values, attitudes, interests and mindsets that provide a constant flow of information about current problems, issues and concerns as well as visions of a better community.

From this point on, we will be exploring two distinct participatory planning approaches that share many of the same methodological roots and tools. They are **strategic planning**, which represents a long-term, visionary approach to the planning process and **action planning**, a process that is more immediate and often concerned with solving problems or gearing up to launch new program initiatives. When the leaders of local governments and civic organisations begin to recognise the benefits that accrue from this type of participatory planning, they often have planning teams working simultaneously on various initiatives.

While these two planning processes need to be addressed somewhat separately to help you either as a trainer/facilitator or as a planning practitioner make sense out of them, they also use many of the same tools to achieve their specific goals and objectives. Before moving on, here are some summary comments about these two approaches to participatory planning.

**Action planning:** This is a process of thinking and acting to accomplish an immediate or intermediate goal. The process of participatory planning is never an end product, only a mechanism or means for achieving results and accomplishing objectives and goals. The time frame for employing action planning, as organising and management tools, is more immediate than those associated with strategic planning.

**Strategic planning:** This is a planning process designed to paint the big picture, create visions, and enable the transformation of shared dreams into reality. Strategic planning is not a tool you use with great frequency; otherwise it becomes dull and ineffective. While strategic plans have more *shelf life* than action plans, they need to be scrutinised periodically and updated to reflect new realities. An ideal time for such reviews from a local government perspective is during the preparation of the annual budget. It grounds the strategic planning process in the reality of on-going fiscal constraints and opportunities while challenging those who prepare and adopt the annual public budget to frame their decisions in futuristic terms.

Strategic plans are useful documents for anchoring action-planning efforts. If we consider the strategic plan as a big jigsaw puzzle, then action plans are like the individual pieces. While the products of action planning are complete in themselves, they are not as meaningful or capable of achieving ancillary results as when they are related to the bigger picture. When we think in these terms, it makes sense to provide an overview of strategic planning before addressing the intricacies of action planning. Whenever possible, tactical planning should be conducted within the larger framework of a long-term strategic plan.

What is important to remember as you read about the two participatory planning processes is the commonality of tools needed to carry out each of them. For example, stakeholder analysis is common to both. So is the contracting process between the client and the external consultant or facilitator.

You are about to enter a super highway with more than one lane of traffic moving in the same direction

Now, about that second lane of traffic. We are inserting a scenario or story line into the text to describe some typical events that might take place during the implementation of participatory planning. Our story line involves a Mayor, her staff and community leaders as they grapple with understanding and implementing the participatory planning process.

In keeping with our *voyage of discovery* metaphor we are calling these story line vignettes **Pit Stops**. If you're a fan of auto racing, you will recognise the importance of the **pit stop**. It's to refuel, get directions, and do other essential tasks. If you aren't a racing fan, you can still appreciate the need to stop from time to time on a long journey. These pit stops are designed to take a break from the *Concepts and Strategies* we will be discussing from this point on and to see how the Mayor and her colleagues are coping with their own voyage of discovery. In keeping with modern highway communication standards, these deviations will be clearly marked.

Before we get on this dual highway, we want to provide you with a more detailed briefing about the *pit stops*.

### **Pit stop**

***Pit stop details.** Our pit stop story line involves a Mayor of a medium sized city who has just learned about a new program that could help her establish a participatory planning process to manage the city's social and economic development more efficiently and effectively. We pick up the action upon her return from an UNCHS conference, where she learned about a program known as Localising Agenda 21. Agenda 21 is a blueprint for sustainable development that was adopted by delegates to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. Behind Agenda 21 is the realisation that many of the problems and solutions concerning sustainable development have their roots in local activities.*

*We will describe in very sketchy terms the steps the Mayor is taking to get a participatory planning process going in her city. Either immediately before or after this part of the discussion (identified as **Pit Stops**) will be **Concepts and Strategies**. We reserve the right to be ambiguous about whether the concepts and strategies come before or after the description of actions. And, of course, remind you that a tolerance for ambiguity will serve you well when getting involved in participatory planning activities.*

### **Putting awareness and vision into action: the decision to involve others**

One of the first steps in the participatory planning process is the decision to involve others. Whether the stimulus to do so is a *vision* about the future, or *awareness* that something needs to be done in the near future to solve a problem or initiate a new program, the next step is to think about whom else should be involved. The challenge is to not only think in *participatory* terms, but to act in *participatory ways*. We will now take our first *pit stop* to see what the Mayor plans to do with her new found vision.

## **Pit stop**

*As we were saying, the mayor has just returned from a UNCHS conference where she learned about a program called **Localising Agenda 21**. She is interested in initiating an Agenda 21 programme in her city. But, there are a number of obstacles to overcome. First, the city staff has not been supportive of involving citizens in a participatory process of decision-making and problem solving. Because of the staff's resistance to involving citizens, the mayor has not encouraged such actions. However, she has been unsuccessful in getting citizen support for many of her programs. The UNCHS conference provided new insights into why she has been unsuccessful and what she might do to engage citizens more directly in the planning and implementation of community based programs and services. She is now more **aware** of why she is unsuccessful and has a **vision** about what she can do to involve citizens more directly.*

*The mayor will need the cooperation and involvement of some key city officials, including one or two council members who she believes will support her. She also needs to reach out into the community and begin the process of getting citizen understanding and support for what she wants to do. The mayor decides to create an initial informal planning group to help her decide how to implement an Agenda 21 programme in her community. She has asked the following persons to serve on the committee: the director of community services; two councillors, one a pro-active community worker and the second a person who often challenges her ideas but with an open mind; the director of the largest social service NGO in the city; and, a grassroots worker with a very successful CBO. She has invited them to meet with her to discuss the conference and her ideas.*

One of the first steps in any participatory planning endeavour is to identify a few of the potential *stakeholders* who can help you conduct a “reality check” to provide help in thinking through your ideas and deciding what to do next. The issue of identifying stakeholders will be a reoccurring event in the participatory planning process. We will come back to this step from time to time as we help you learn how to implement a successful planning and implementation process that involves a cross section of the community. The final assembly of stakeholders can be quite large depending on the scope and complexity of the problem or opportunity being addressed.

Before going further, it will help to define what we mean by “stakeholders.” They are persons, groups or organisations who can put a claim on the actions, resources or output of your proposed participatory planning activities or who will be affected by the outputs of your plans. Given this broad definition, stakeholders can be a contradictory and mixed bunch of people and organisations. For example, they are *those who want you to succeed in your plans and those who would like to see you fail*.

The stakeholder analysis task in any participatory planning process, whether it is the development of a long term strategic plan or planning for the construction of an all-purpose community facility, is essential to its eventual success. And most of those who write about such processes would agree with us about its importance. What they might differ on is the timing, when to conduct a stakeholder analysis. We contend that this is a reiterative task, one that should be revisited from time to time as the participatory planning process unfolds. The key stakeholders in helping the mayor decide whether or not to undertake a participatory planning activity may be involved from that point on, or they may not. You can predict the cast of stakeholders will change as the participation process builds momentum and the focus of the intervention becomes clearer. You will also begin to make some distinctions among the various stakeholders according to whether they will be critical, *important* or just *useful* to the process. But we will have more to say about these distinctions later.

## **Reflection time**

A few pages ago, we asked you to identify three problems and opportunities. Review them and select one to work with in this reflection exercise. Write down the stakeholders you believe would be needed to either resolve the problem or take advantage of the potential opportunity. List them in priority: 1 = being most important, 2 = next most important, etc.

### ***Problem Statement***

Potential stakeholders

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### ***Opportunity Statement***

Potential stakeholders

- 1.

- 2.
- 3.

### **Key points**

- Problems and opportunities trigger participatory planning ventures.
- *Problems* are discovered through *awareness* of our immediate environment: something is wrong and needs fixed or something is missing and needs initiated.
- *Opportunities* create visions: what the future holds for those who dream, plan and act on their dreams and plans.
- Problems, issues and concerns that are immediate and call for quick action are best addressed through participatory planning that is action-oriented, what we are calling *action planning*.
- Opportunities, when they involve the implementation of over-the-horizon visions call for *strategic planning*.
- After becoming aware or having visions of what can be, those so fortunate will want to reach out and involve others. (Those who advocate participatory planning methods rarely act alone.)
- Their first act is to say, “Who else has a stake in solving this problem, in starting this initiative, or in sharing this vision?”
- These “stakeholders” are persons, groups or organisations who can put a claim on the actions, resources or output of your proposed participatory planning activities or will be affected by the outputs of your plans.
- Stakeholders may be advocates of what we plan to do or distracters, those who want to fight what we want to do. Ignore the latter kind of stakeholders at your peril.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Peter Block, “**Flawless Consulting**”, San Diego, CA.: University Associates, 1981, p. 13



## CHAPTER 5

### PHASE II: BUILDING PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The beginning is the most important part of the work  
**PLATO, THE REPUBLIC**

Phase One merely opens the door so the participatory planning process can begin. There is *awareness* that something needs to be done in the local government and community that could benefit from the participatory planning process. Or, someone sees an opportunity and has a vision to realise it. As they ponder either of these possibilities, they also realise that others need to be involved. The Mayor, in the following *Pit Stop* story line, has already acted on her need to involve others and has put together an initial planning group.

Before we return to the *Pit Stop* to follow her next steps, we want to brief you on the essence of Stage Two: Building Productive Partnerships. First, we have assumed that many participatory planning processes will, in fact, use the services of an external facilitator. By *external* we mean either a hired professional trainer-consultant-facilitator type, or someone selected from within one of the collaborating institutions involved in the PP process who is skilled and experienced in facilitating these kinds of group planning events. In the latter case, this person would be expected to act as a neutral party to guide the planning team through the various steps in the process.

While we have focused our attention on the role of the facilitator as a way of describing the skills and various steps required in building productive partnerships, ***these skills and steps are generic enough to be used by managers and others in many different situations.***

This Stage, which we have identified as *Building Productive Partnerships*, is what others might call *contracting or social contracting*. The social contract is an explicit agreement about how individuals or groups are going to work together and what they expect from each other. It can cover wants and needs of the parties “contracting” with each other, as well as ground rules of working together, values that might be important to consider, the use of resources, and other concerns or issues of importance to the working relationship.

We will be returning to the *Pit Stop* now to see how the Mayor and her new team is dealing with the “social contracting” phase of their efforts to put together a participatory planning effort. They will also be confronting a bit of a dilemma in terms of the type of planning they will be doing. The Mayor realises from the conversation with her new planning partners that what she wants to do is something called “strategic planning”. At the same time, a community worker on her new team is interested in solving an immediate problem in her neighbourhood.

#### **Step One: Deciding to get help**

##### **Pit stop**

*The mayor with the help of her initial planning group made some fundamental decisions about what to do. The initial planning group liked what they heard about the Localising Agenda 21 programme and found themselves being caught up in the mayor’s enthusiasm for undertaking such a program in their city. And then reality sets in. They reminded themselves about the staff’s reluctance to work with citizens and the mayor’s own difficulty in getting citizens involved in other programs. It was clear to everyone that any plan to implement Local Agenda 21 would need strong citizen input. The city’s track record in this area was, to put it politely, weak. The group, including the mayor, decided it would be too risky to undertake a major planning effort like Local Agenda 21 at this time.*

*Just as the meeting was about to end, the director of the largest NGO in the city and the grass roots worker from the CBO both spoke up, nearly in unison. The NGO Director told about an experience her organisation had recently with developing a strategic plan for the organisation. She was glowing in her comments about the experience and the results. She said, “For the first time in our organisation’s history, we have long term goals and an overall strategy for achieving them. It occurred to me, Mayor, that you might think about doing the same as an initial step in getting prepared to undertake the Agenda 21 programme.”*

*“That sounds great”, responded the CBO worker with a bit of sarcasm in her voice, “but I think the city needs to get some experience working with citizens before they ‘take on the UN and its grand schemes’.” Then she asked the group if it would consider starting small to get some experience in this process others had been calling participatory planning.*

*The worker went on to explain. A small group of rural families representing a different ethnic group than those already living in the community had just moved into some vacant housing in her neighbourhood. Everyone was worried about the social and economic consequences, not to mention what might happen to the physical environment, but no one seemed to know what to do about it. She admitted that the board of her neighbourhood CBO, that operates*

*a day care centre for some of the single mothers, was also at a loss to cope with the situation. Would the mayor and others be willing to help?*

*The mayor, visibly moved by the woman's plea, was also fascinated with the notion of preparing a strategic plan for the city. Not sure quite how to deal with these last minute suggestions, the mayor asked the group to stay for a moment longer. She was prepared to lend the support of her office to provide some kind of assistance to the woman's neighbourhood, but admitted that she would probably need their help. She also wanted to know more about this "strategic planning thing" the NGO director had suggested the mayor consider.*

*After a long discussion, the group decided that the two efforts were not incompatible. In fact, they should be complementary. The neighbourhood effort could benefit from an overall city development plan, assuming it dealt with social and economic development issues for all the city's residents. And, the strategic planning effort could use the neighbourhood problem as a case study to assure the long term strategy for the city is grounded in reality. The mayor, with some help from her ad hoc advisors, decided she would need a two different planning groups, one representing key people and institutions city wide and the other more concerned with the pending neighbourhood conflict. In both cases, she would have to assign city staff to be involved. She was concerned about having city input to the plans and the capacity to follow up on any decisions that might need city resources.*

*Just as the meeting was to adjourn for the second time, the director of community services spoke up. He told the mayor these planning groups would need someone to help run the meetings, someone skilled in assisting teams make group decisions and solve problems. The group discussed the possibility of using a city official, such as the planning director, to be the facilitator. But the mayor felt the person should come from outside the city organisation. She was also concerned about over burdening her staff with new assignments.*

*At this point the mayor made two astute observations about the potential role of the person who would help facilitate the participatory planning process. First, she said most city employees would find it difficult to remain neutral in such planning deliberations and, therefore, would not be good group facilitators. In addition, she said they might be important stakeholders in the process and should be given an opportunity to be involved.*

*Before adjourning, the group discussed the following criteria for selecting a facilitator. The candidate should:*

- have a reputation for being fair and impartial in working with different stakeholders
- understand how multi-ethnic communities function and the role of various key actors in the process
- have extensive experience in working with groups representing different interests, and
- possess knowledge and skills in helping groups make sound decisions while building their capacity to work together effectively as a team.

*After her meeting with the initial planning group, the mayor and her staff contacted three facilitators who lived in the area. The human resource management officer reviewed their resumes, checked their references and discussed the potential candidates with those who had been in on the decision to hire a facilitator. Based on the officer's recommendation, the mayor asked the facilitator with the most experience and best reputation in working with community planning groups to come to her office for an interview.*

The decision to work with an external specialist is an important one because it has implications at several levels of interaction. It may result in various kinds of resistance within the employing organisation since it inserts a new variable in the decision making process. More importantly, it will influence how effectively and efficiently those who will be involved in the participatory planning process work together as a team. These "outsiders" are called by different names: facilitators, consultants, and on occasion, interveners. While we will be referring to them as facilitators from now on, it may help to make some distinctions among these labels.

### **Consultant**

Peter Block, the author of *Flawless Consulting*, says:

***A consultant is a person in a position to have some influence over an individual, a group, or an organisation, but who has no direct power to make changes or implement programs. A manager is someone who has direct control over the action.***<sup>1</sup>

Block goes on to say the moment the consultant takes control, he or she begins acting as a manager (and not the kind of *consultant* Block has in mind). Of course, there are many kinds of *consultants*. Most often they are experts in a specific discipline or field who come into the organisation, or community, and give advice. The role, intent, values and working styles of the content consultant are very different from those of the process consultant. The central focus of the Block approach to process consulting is to help those in the organisation or community make better decisions based on their own resources and understanding of the situation. Another fundamental difference between these two approaches to consulting has to do with who "owns" the problem or opportunity, and the solution. With external experts, the

ownership often stays with them as they take the next train or plane out of town. As a result, nothing much happens to the consultant's good advice that is left behind.

### **Facilitator**

The facilitator role is *always* described as being different from the expert consultant and more in line with the process consultant, who Block would contend also comes to the client relationship with some area of expertise. However, there is a slight difference between the Block approach to consultation and what others describe as the facilitation role.

Roger Schwarz has written the definitive work on facilitation and describes the role of the facilitator as:

*A person who is acceptable to all members of the group, substantially neutral, and has no decision-making authority, who intervenes to help a group improve the way it identifies and solves problems and makes decisions, in order to increase the group's effectiveness.*<sup>2</sup>

What's the difference? Admittedly, not much, but it is worth discussing for a moment. Block extends his brand of consulting to include more than groups and acknowledges that his kind of consultancy has some influence over decisions made by the client. Schwarz limits his notion of the facilitator's relationship to the group and says the facilitator has no decision-making authority. They are obviously minor points and not worth arguing over. The fundamental values and skills are essentially the same.

### **Intervene**

What about the role of the intervene? On occasion you will come across this term in the literature about consulting and facilitation but it is often in reference to a particular process. Both Block and Schwarz use a derivative of the term to help describe their own approaches to helping others in decision making and problem solving situations. Schwarz says "To intervene means to 'enter into an ongoing system' for the purpose of helping those in the system." It implies that the system or group is complete and functioning autonomously, but that it depends on the facilitator for help temporarily. He believes the facilitator in these interventions has the responsibility to build the system's capacity to facilitate its own actions down the road without the help of the external facilitator. In other words, the facilitator makes his or her role redundant and unnecessary.

Block says that interventions are the goals or products of the consulting activity. They come in two varieties: (1) a change in the way the organisation, group or individual operates (structural, policy-oriented or procedural); and (2) client learning or knowing how to do something differently as a result of the consultant's intervention.<sup>3</sup>

### **Clients**

Both Block and Schwarz and others who write about these things use the term "client." We will also use the term because it helps to clarify the role of the consultants and facilitators in relationship to those they assist to implement the participatory planning process.

Block defines the client as a person or persons whom the consultant wants to influence without exercising direct control.<sup>3</sup> Schwarz makes it a bit more complicated. He talks about four types of clients. These distinctions are important when we are talking about participatory planning. Let's look briefly at the differences. The first is the *client contact*, the person who makes initial contact with the facilitator. This could be the mayor's secretary or assistant. For the facilitator this is the time to get some useful information before talking to someone with more authority. For example: What individual or group is seeking help? Why are they seeking help? Is the initial contact person a member of this group? How far along are they in their work together? While the facilitator needs to be sensitive in asking such questions during the initial contact, any insights that can be gained at this time will be useful in understanding what the client is thinking.

Schwarz also talks about *intermediary* and *primary* clients. The intermediary client is involved in the early part of the contracting process. In the case of our mayor, she may turn out to be the intermediate client. His definition of the *primary* client is the individual or group who has accepted responsibility for the *problem* or *opportunity*.

The fourth that Schwarz mentions is the *ultimate* client, the stakeholder whose interest should be protected even if they are not in direct contact with the consultant, e.g., the general public.

### **Pit stop**

*The mayor may in the course of early discussions say something like the following which helps to determine who the primary client really is:*

*"If we reach an agreement to use your services, you will be working with a diverse group of local government representatives and citizens. Your primary responsibilities will be to help that group. Even though there are members of my staff in the planning group, they are to be treated just like everyone else on the team."*

Rather than become overwhelmed by this definition problem, consider the advice of the authors of a recent book on *client-centered consulting*. They say don't define your client system too narrowly. In taking their own advice on this issue, they keep three queries in mind:

- **Who knows** - about the problem or has the most information needed to carry out a thorough diagnosis of the problem or potential opportunity?
- **Who cares** – about solving the problem or fulfilling the opportunity?
- **Who can** – help solve the problem or make the opportunity happen? <sup>4</sup>

The client system is not complete, they say, until it includes everyone who is involved in the answers to these three questions: Who knows? Who cares? Who can?

### **Reflection time**

Return to the problem/opportunity statement you selected earlier for the task of identifying stakeholders. If you were asked to become a facilitator to work on this situation, who do you think the initial client or someone who would want you to work on this situation might be? And who would be the most logical primary client charged with the responsibility for managing the intervention?

### **Step Two: The initial meeting between facilitator and client**

#### **Pit stop**

*If you recall, the mayor selected a potential facilitator and asked him to come in for an interview. She also asked the NGO executive director and the neighbourhood worker who were both involved in the earlier planning session to attend the meeting with the prospective facilitator. The mayor had already asked the NGO director if she would be willing to be chairperson of the strategic planning process since she had recent experience in preparing a plan for her organisation. She had asked the chairperson of the social service committee of city council if she would chair the neighbourhood planning process. The mayor was concerned about the need for council's support for both these efforts and wanted to get them involved more directly in both efforts.*

*The mayor's decision on the chairperson for the strategic planning initiative was based on two criteria. First, she wanted to send a message to the community and to her staff that she was serious about involving citizens in this planning process, not just local government and other public agency officials. The second criterion was equally important. The NGO director had a reputation for being fair, was known for her excellent group skills, and had experience working with outside facilitators. On this last point, the mayor recognised the possibility of conflict between the chairperson of the planning group and the facilitator if either one of them wanted to step out of their respective roles and take control.*

*Her choice of chairperson for the neighbourhood planning group was, as just mentioned, based in part on getting councillors more directly involved in planning initiatives. In addition, the person was known to be open-minded with excellent small group skills.*

*During a two-hour meeting involving the mayor, the original planning group she had convened earlier, the two chairpersons and the facilitator, a decision was made to go ahead with both planning initiatives. The mayor made a convincing case to give the strategic planning effort a slightly higher priority so it could lay the groundwork for a long-term, city-wide planning and development initiative based on the Localising Agenda 21 Programme. She also realised that the ultimate success of an Agenda 21 effort would depend on strong neighbourhood involvement. She felt the risk of having two participatory planning initiatives running at about the same time was not significant.*

*Some members of the team were a bit surprised the mayor was willing at this time to undertake both planning initiatives, given their understanding about the staff's reluctance to involving citizens in these kinds of decisions. As the mayor explained, she had been having many discussions with her staff and community leaders about the need to provide more direction and focus to the city's development over the long run. At this point, she turned to the neighbourhood worker and NGO director and said,*

*"In all honesty, I must give you both credit for opening my eyes. Your commitment and enthusiasm for addressing the ethnic problem in your neighbourhood helped me understand several issues that have been bothering me during my term as mayor. The elected councillors, my staff and I had come to believe that we alone have the responsibility for*

*what happens in the city. And frankly, this insular attitude has kept us from reaching out to involve others. I'm now convinced that this reluctance to involve citizens was due in large part to our collective fear of losing control. But, the more we discussed these problems in our council and staff meetings, the more we realised we can't act alone if we want to bring about significant changes in the city. Interacting with the two of you has helped me appreciate the kinds of potential resources we have in the community."*

*At this point in the discussion, the mayor asked the facilitator to talk about any concerns he had about facilitating these two efforts since there might be some overlap in timing. She had already asked him to take on both assignments and he had agreed, but she thought others on the planning committee would like to hear his views. He reassured the mayor and others that he saw no conflict in pursuing the two participatory planning efforts separately but mentioned the advantages of linking them together. By addressing the neighbourhood problem immediately, they could use it as a case study to be presented to those who would be involved in the strategic planning effort. The other option, he suggested, would be to schedule the strategic planning workshop first so the neighbourhood planning process could take advantage of any visions or long-range plans agreed upon in the city-wide effort.*

*The mayor was concerned that any delay in providing help to the neighbourhood might increase the possibility of conflict. On the other hand, she wanted to get the strategic planning process underway. At this point, the facilitator suggested to the Mayor that he work directly with her and the NGO Director to design the strategic planning workshop. He had a recent experience with a neighbouring city in helping them develop such a plan and offered to get the two mayors together to discuss the results.*

*On the neighbourhood issue, the facilitator recommended that he work directly with the councillor who had been asked to chair the neighbourhood planning meetings. While the facilitator saw the chairperson of the neighbourhood planning process as the primary client for that project, he assured the mayor that he would keep her fully informed about the progress in the neighbourhood planning project.*

*In return, he said he would need the following support from her office:*

- (1) Access to any data and information the city staff might have that would contribute to the neighbourhood decision making process, and*
- (2) Access to the mayor and her office to resolve any political issues that might get in the way, to encourage the participation of other stakeholders, and to provide whatever official support might be needed to achieve the goals of the planning process.*

*Before the meeting adjourned, the mayor set up an appointment to meet with the facilitator and the individual she had asked to be chairperson of the strategic planning process. Localising Agenda 21 was looking more likely. So was her re-election.*

### **Some thoughts on that first encounter**

Designed Learning (DL), an organisation noted for its efforts to prepare staff consultants, organisational members with a special responsibility for helping others in the organisation be more effective and productive has described the essence of the initial contracting meeting better than any we have seen. The elements DL believe are important to cover in the initial meeting between the consultant/facilitator and client are these:

- **Personal Acknowledgement.** This is the first "hello" in the facilitator/client relationship. The goal is to make contact and to express how you feel about the opportunity to meet with your new client. It's also a good time to learn how your client decided to get in touch.
- **Communicating and Understanding the Situation.** What you are looking for at this point in the discussion is the opportunity to understand the situation from the client's perspective and to convey your understanding back to the client. This is not the time to roll out your recommendations on how to design a participatory planning event. Questions like the following would be appropriate: What prompted you to decide on initiating such a process in the community? Who do you think should be involved? How does your staff feel about working with citizens in this way?
- **Client Wants and Offers:** At this point in the conversation you want to find out what the client wants from the proposed planning process and from you personally as a consultant or facilitator in the process. This is the client's opportunity to express his or her expectations, but you may have to help by asking some probing questions. Some possible questions to consider asking: What do you hope to accomplish through this planning process? How do you see us working together? What role do you want to play in the planning process? What will success look like?

- **Facilitator Wants and Needs.** Before reaching an agreement with your client, you will want to express your expectations and what you will need from the client to be successful in working with the planning group. You may also need clarification about the role you will perform working with the client. The client may see you as the expert who will write-up your ideas about the city's future, for example, and get the planning team to rubberstamp for adoption by the city council. Consider the following statements as a way to get at these and other issues: My role will be to help the planning team analyse the situation and come up with workable options. I want your support in working with the planning team. I want access to your planning staff and their database. I will need to work directly with the planning team in helping them develop options. This stage in the conversation is often the most difficult for many facilitators, but it is important to be assertive about your own wants and needs at this time.

At this point, DL recommends reaching an agreement by restating the key issues discussed and identifying any unresolved areas that need to be considered.

The client may have some lingering concerns about losing control as you begin to work with others in this planning process. You will want to resolve these concerns and to be assured of the commitment to move ahead.

The final steps in the initial meeting have to do with giving the client support and positive feedback about the initiatives being taken and with being clear about what happens next.<sup>5</sup>

### **Contracting means having re-visitation rights**

Contracting, building a problem-solving relationship between the facilitator and the client, is often repeated at several levels of intervention based on the complexity of the problem-solving relationship. In the case of participatory planning where there will be increasing and deepening levels of interaction between local government officials, civic organisations and citizens, it is necessary for the facilitator and key initiators of the process to revisit the contracting phase.

For example, expectations, wants and needs of stakeholders who are dealt into the process at later stages will need to be considered. The mayor, who initially wanted to carry out a *Local Agenda 21* programme in her city, had also agreed to assist a neighbourhood deal with a potentially ugly confrontation. She may have seen this as an opportunity to build more credibility in the community, to demonstrate her commitment to work more closely with citizens and to get some first hand experience with participatory planning before getting involved in a much broader strategic planning process. Or, she may have felt she had few options during the closing moments of the initial meeting to say "no" to the neighbourhood worker. As the facilitator, it would be important to check out whether her needs are being met by this new arrangement. Based on what we know happened at the initial meeting between the mayor, newly appointed chairperson of the planning group, the neighbourhood worker and the facilitator, we can assume there was a need for additional contracting.

## **Step Three: Working with the "Primary" client**

### **Pit stop**

*When the initial meeting between the mayor who was the initial client, the facilitator, and members of the participatory planning team was held, several decisions were made. The chairperson was to be the facilitator's primary client although the mayor expected to be kept informed of progress. The city staff was to be available to help in data collection and analysis, if necessary, and the CBO staff member was to help involve key people in the neighbourhood. The mayor offered her support and direct involvement as a political and community leader, if needed. We can also assume there were further discussions about the mayor's expectations about other members of the team, an acceptable timetable for completing the tasks, possible venues for meeting, and with whom the city staff should work to carry out certain tasks.*

*When the facilitator, chairperson of the neighbourhood committee and CBO worker left the meeting with the mayor, they adjourned to a local coffee shop to continue their discussion. They were each feeling the need to be clear about their respective expectations, needs and wants. In other words, they were still dealing with those issues we have been associating with the contracting phase between an external facilitator/consultant and the client. The issues they discussed included:*

- *What their individual roles and responsibilities would be in working with the planning team and, more generally, in implementing the project*
- *How they would organise and conduct the meetings*
- *Who else should serve on the planning team and how they would be selected therefore expanding the stakeholder circle again*
- *How they would handle publicity about their progress*

- *Meeting logistics including venue, workshop materials, staff needs, meeting times, and many more details*
- *How they would measure success and the ultimate impact of the participatory planning effort within the neighbourhood and larger community, and*
- *Who would do what within the next week to keep the project and process on track?*

*And finally, how would they link their efforts into the Mayor's larger strategic planning initiative? If she wants to use this as a case study to be presented at the strategic planning workshop, they might need to be more attentive to documenting their own process of participatory planning.*

The contracting phase of any facilitated intervention can be difficult. And, we have spent more time discussing this initial stage of the participatory planning process than we had intended. However, it is the most critical aspect of the intervention. If these initial meetings do not go well, they will come back to haunt those involved.

Just a few more comments about the coffee shop meeting. The initial team was beginning to move from contracting to planning, from building the problem-solving relationship to putting the relationship to work. They also were recognising the importance of the stakeholder analysis, the need to determine whom else should serve on their participatory planning team. It is a task they would return to repeatedly if they were to be successful in getting the participatory planning process underway in the troubled neighbourhood.

Before closing this discussion about Building Productive Partnerships, here is a short checklist of information you will want to get from the client before getting into the heart of the planning process.

#### **A checklist of what the contract should include**

Facilitators need to be as clear about the following information if they are going to be effective in working with the client.

1. ***What are the objectives of the pending intervention?*** In other words, what does the client want to accomplish through this participatory planning process? The more specific this definition is, the greater the possibility you can accomplish it together. But, there may be some differences in the objectives agreed upon with the initial contact client, e.g., the mayor; the members of the participatory planning group; and, the ultimate clients, the citizens. Be prepared to alter the objectives as the process unfolds. After all, this is a participatory planning process where authentic communication, shared leadership, and teamwork are intended to prevail.
2. ***What will be the roles and responsibilities of the key actors?*** These include the facilitator, the client(s), and the supporting cast of characters.
3. ***What are the parameters of the project?*** Participatory planning processes can be very targeted and therefore easy to draw boundaries around, e.g., integrating rural families into an urban neighbourhood, or be expansive, such as Local Agenda 21. Whatever the circumstances, the boundaries will need to be mutually drawn.
4. ***What kind of information will be needed to carry out the planning process?*** Some planning ventures can be conducted from the knowledge and experience of the participants. Others will need a solid database. It is important to be clear about these informational needs before getting too far down the participatory planning track.
5. ***What kind of support and involvement will be needed from the client and the facilitator?*** Practical things come to mind to those of us who have worked as facilitators. They include: meeting spaces that can accommodate large and small group work activities; administrative and secretarial support to make sure logistical concerns don't overwhelm the planning process; and the usual tools of the participatory planning trade, e.g., newsprint and magic markers, to name two.
6. ***What are the time constraints?*** The client may have one deadline in mind and the facilitator another. While Parkinson's Law suggests the task will expand to fill the time allotted, this is not acceptable to most parties in a contracting relationship.
7. ***What output is the facilitated process expected to deliver?*** The time schedule will be much easier to determine if you know the answer to this question. In the case of the participatory planning process, the most obvious product is a plan. But plans come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. While the content of the plan may be obvious based on the planning objectives, the process of delivering it may not be so obvious. The facilitator should help the client think more concretely about this aspect of the planning effort. As we get into discussing the preparation of the plan, we will want to focus on the kinds of outputs and outcomes the local government and community can expect as the plan gets implemented.

8. **What values will need to be explicit and upheld?** This element of the contract between the facilitator and client may be more difficult to define. Confidentiality is often an issue and there may be different interpretations about the parameters to be honoured. In a participatory planning process, city officials might want to restrict the sharing of information for political reasons while team members feel the fruits of their efforts should be shared widely and immediately in the community.
9. **What about flexibility?** Social contracts, like the ones defining the relationship between facilitators and clients in a participatory planning process, will have clauses that are unpredictable. Don't be afraid to renegotiate the contract as the relationship evolves.

### **Reflection time**

We have spent a large amount of time discussing the contracting phase of participatory planning. Before moving on, think about your own experience in working with teams that cut across organisation and functional boundaries. What could you have done differently at the time that would have increased the potential for success? Jot down your answers in the space below

### **Key points**

- Building productive partnerships may be the most important thing you do in the participatory planning process.
- The task of building partnerships begins with the first “hello” between partners, and continues.
- The art of contracting between those who want to initiate participatory planning, those who ultimately do it, and those who facilitate the process is a complex process.
- The concept of the “client” is important to understand in the PP process.
- Knowing who the principal clients are and working with them as clients is even more important.
- Clients can be identified by three queries: Who knows? Who cares? Who can?
- The social contract between the facilitator and the planning team is anchored in mutual agreements about what the parties expect of each other and how they are going to work together.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Block, Peter. “**Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used**”. San Diego, CA.: University Associates, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Schwarz, Roger M. “**The Skilled Facilitator**”. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Block, *op. Cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cockman, Peter, Bill Evans and Peter Reynolds, “**Client-centered Consulting, Getting Your Expertise Used When You're Not In Charge**”. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> We want to thank Design Learning, Inc. (DL) for its excellent ideas and insights about the first encounter between the client and the facilitator/consultant. This material is part of a staff consulting skills training program DL offers to organisations to develop internal consultants.



## CHAPTER 6

### PHASE III: REACHING OUT - OR - FOCUSING IN

What is built on chance is built on sand  
**HAITIAN PROVERB**

#### ***Gaining perspective***

It's time to stop for a moment and reflect on where we are in the participatory process. We have looked at the managerial and leadership traits of *awareness* and *vision* and how they serve as triggering events to move organisations, communities and individuals to action. We have also made some distinctions that help us understand the differences between problems and opportunities and the way we approach them through planning processes although we are always amazed at how problems get translated into opportunities in the hands of creative people. These discussions are wrapped around the embracing notion that gaining broader and deeper collaboration, something akin to assertive participation, is in many cases an important concept and strategy in building institutional and community capacity to serve all citizens more effectively and efficiently.

Some would argue that participation is not a cure for all problems or an imperative for pursuing all opportunities. And, we would be the first to agree with this perspective. However, we see no reason to apologise for our pro-active stance about the benefits of collaboration. After all, this is a manual about participatory planning.

As a part of our discussion, we have made some distinctions between *strategic* and *action* planning as two distinct ways to engage in participatory activities and events for the betterment of our communities and local governments. Strategic planning is about capturing visions and installing them into our community's long-range navigational system. Action planning is a practical set of tools to be applied by managers, policy makers, community leaders and citizens in a "working together mode" to make good things happen.

What we find interesting about these two planning approaches is the commonality of steps we use to carry them out and the values they encompass. They both require various kinds of analyses to be effective: stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, SWOT and force field analysis. Each approach, in its own way, requires the participants to "think outside the box" to engage in creative thinking and problem solving if the fruits of their participatory planning endeavours are to be savoured with satisfaction.

The major differences in the two approaches are the time frames and level of specificity in the recommendations forthcoming from the planning efforts. Strategic plans are future-oriented, long-term, visionary, and less specific. Action plans are more immediate, pragmatic, detailed in their recommendations, and, of course action-oriented. They carry an implicit mandate that calls for immediate implementation.

The two approaches share many values: authentic communications, shared leadership, trust, teamwork, commitment, inclusiveness - all qualities that enhance both the process of collaboration and the results that flow from working together. We have spent a considerable amount of time talking about the importance of building productive partnerships and the advantages of working with a facilitator when engaging in participatory planning processes. These are key components in assuring success in both strategic and action planning activities.

#### ***Where the two planning approaches diverge***

At this point in "planning" for participatory planning, there will need to be a decision based on the triggering event that brought the key stakeholders to this juncture. Does that triggering event call for the development of a strategic plan to be pursued over a longer time frame (5-10-15 years, for example), or a planning process that will lead to immediate action? Will those partners who are recruited to participate in the planning process be *reaching out* or *focusing in*? Strategic planning is reaching out to the future in an effort to understand it and to influence what it might become. Action planning achieves its best results from focusing in on the problem, issue or concern that is calling for attention. Do something! Solve me! Help!

As we emphasised a bit earlier, both of these planning processes share many of the same tools to reach their goals. What does set them apart is the decision to go "strategic" and reach out, or to be more action-oriented and focus in. There are two tools that symbolise these two divergent approaches. The one is visioning, and the other *problem finding*. Of course, this statement is immediately open for attack by some of our closest friends. And we admit, it is useful to be "visionary" when solving problems and important to "focus in" when planning strategically. However, if we don't make a distinction at this point, we will continue to confuse you and confound our own need to get on with this discussion.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss the strategic planning process, including the role and skill of visioning, and look at the very practical tool of problem finding, the art of focusing in.

### ***Strategic planning: The art of reaching out and gathering in the future***

Plans are nothing:  
Planning is everything  
**D. D. EISENHOWER**

The decision to engage significant members of your organisation or community is usually triggered by someone's vision, a traumatic event, or an opportunity. In the case of the mayor in our mythical case study, it was the UNCHS conference and her interest in the Localising Agenda 21 programme. It could have been triggered by other events as well. For example:

- the loss of a major employer in the city
- an opportunity to get a large infrastructure loan from an international development bank
- a policy decision by the council to focus on the well-being and quality of life issues regarding the children in their community, or
- the need to forge closer relationships with NGOs and the business community. Strategic planning as an event just doesn't happen. It's a deliberate act to engage a wide spectrum of organisation or community leaders in a contemplative look over the horizon.

Strategic Planning is a time for reflection, a time to think about the future and what that future should be for the community.

Strategic Planning is an opportunity to position local government and the community to take on the future and all its unknown challenges.

Strategic Planning is not something local governments and citizens should do every month.

In other words, strategic planning is a serious undertaking to build a community compass that will guide local government and its citizens from where they are now to where they want to be because they have thought about where they want to be.

### ***Visions and visioning***

There is nothing like a dream to create the future  
**VICTOR HUGO**

At the heart of successful strategic planning are *visions* and *visioning*. Visions are vivid statements of hope grounded in the belief that committed individuals will transform them into future statements of reality. Strategic planning is the stream of events that takes today's vision to its future destination. Visions are bold, optimistic images of what can be. They are Martin Luther King's, *we shall overcome*, Vaclav Havel's *velvet revolution* and Nelson Mandela's vision of a post-apartheid *rainbow society*. Unfortunately, there is also a dark side of the visioning process. Hitler was a visionary, so was Josef Stalin. And millions paid the ultimate price.

Without visions, strategic plans are mere extensions of today's realities dressed up in future rhetoric. Or, as Gary Hamel fears, strategic planning without visions becomes merely "a calendar-driven ritual, reducing complexity to the same simple written rules, assuming the future will be the same as the past with a few minor embellishments, and rarely challenges conventional wisdom."<sup>1</sup> In case you missed the message, we believe the visioning process is important when creating strategic plans.

Visions are realistic, credible, and inspiring statements about the future of the organisation or community or such statements about one aspect of organisation or community life, if the strategic PP process is to focus on a more specific opportunity. Another way to think about visions is to ask, "If our fondest dreams about this community were realised, what would it be like to be a citizen in its midst twenty years from now?"

Burt Nanus, who has written extensively about leadership issues for NGOs and CBOs, spells out a four-phase approach to developing vision statements for such organisations. Since this manual is directed in large measure to the NGO/CBO audience, we thought it would be useful to share his insights about this process.

**Phase 1: The Vision Audit:** responds to questions about the nature and purpose of the organisation, its values and culture, its strengths and weaknesses, the benefits it provides for the community and clients, strategies now used to improve performance, and ways performance is measured.

**Phase 2: the Vision Scope:** major constituents are identified and examined, threats and opportunities evaluated, and the boundaries of the new vision specified.

**Phase 3: the Vision Context:** this examines future developments that may affect the choice of a new direction, including changes in the needs and wants of various clientele groups, and forces affecting the future economic, social, political, and institutional climate of the organisation.

**Phase 4: the Vision Choice:** alternative vision statements are formulated and compared using a set of criteria developed from the earlier analysis, a new vision statement developed and strategic implications considered.<sup>2</sup>

### **Reflection time**

Stop for a moment and write a vision statement for your organisation as you would like it to be 15 years from now.

### **Strategic qualities**

Hamel makes another point about the process of strategic planning that is central to what we want to convey about these endeavours as vessels of public leadership. *Strategy making must be democratic.* Democracy is not simply about the right to be heard; it is about the opportunity to influence opinion and action. It is about being impatient and impassioned, informed and involved. The real power of democracy is its commitment to inclusion. Not only the elite can shape the agenda. So it should be with forging strategic plans for local governments and communities.

The key to effective strategic planning is largely in the process and not the product or the plan. For the process to be effective, it needs to be:

1. **inclusive** - engaging the full range of stakeholders in the process
2. **interactive** - confronting what is with what can be
3. **integrative** - fusing bottom up with top down thinking and acting, and
4. **iterative** - recognising that purposeful systems and their environments are continuously changing and no plan retains its value over time.

As John Friedman reminds us, “Planning is not merely concerned with the efficient instrumentation of objectives, it is also a process by which a society may discover its future.”<sup>3</sup>

### **A quick survey of the strategic planning landscape**

There has been a flood of published ideas and rhetoric about strategic planning. But, the strategic planning process, as a policy and managerial mandate, has had its ups and downs. While it was an expected thing to do, in both public and private organisations in the nineteen sixties and seventies, it fell from grace in the early 1980s. The disenchantment resulted, in large measure, from the process being *owned* by planners and the plans becoming, as Hamel put it so well, *calendar driven rituals*. With the emerging attention on democratic self-governance and civil society in the last decade and growing awareness of the need for and importance of greater participation in these worthy community ventures, the role of strategic planning has taken on new meaning.

The strategic planning process, as practised around the world, is cut from many cloths. There is no unitary model or doctrine to turn to in deciding how to apply the process at the local level of governance and community. This is a positive sign. It challenges users to create their own approach from a storehouse of templates. It suggests the need to be creative and visionary not only in the content of their visions and plans, but in the process of creating them. Given this challenge, the following is a collection of useful hints and templates from the experience of others. We start with a model that has been used worldwide to help communities develop strategic plans.

### **Future search: A process for finding common ground**

Marvin Weisbrod and his colleagues have spent a lot of time perfecting a model that combines the need to be holistic and visionary with the importance of inclusion thus assuring widespread participation in the process. Since their criteria for finding common future ground is compatible with ours, we decided to describe in some detail their planning design.

The *Future Search* approach to community strategic planning is a two-day conference staged over three days (from noon on Day 1 to noon, Day 3) for reasons that become clear as we look at the schedule of tasks to be completed by the participants. The conference planners advocate a “whole system” perspective to strategic planning and liken it to the parable about the blind men and the elephant. Our understanding of the community is only as good as our ability to see it from the perspectives of others. When the blind men were asked to describe the elephant, they gave different

descriptions based on the parts of the elephant they were touching. Only when they put their individual perceptions together were they able to “see” more clearly the object they were examining.

To help those involved in a future search process achieve a whole systems’ perspective, the conference should include the following participants, or stakeholders, as we have been calling them: *people with information, people with authority and resources to act, and people affected by what happens.*

Here, briefly, is an outline of the Future Search process. These steps assume the conference planners and key visionary strategists who are behind the decision to hold a search conference have also identified the focus of the conference.

**DAY 1:** (starting at noon and going to six p.m.) Working individually and then in small groups, participants review the past and identify present trends. The first task gives participants an opportunity to analyse:

- their own experience with the organisation or community depending on the focus of the conference
- the history of the local government or community over the past thirty years or so, the object of the future search, and
- milestones in the life of the local government or the community it represents and serves.

The second task is to identify existing trends that will have an impact on the outcome of the topic being addressed through the conference. These trends are written on a large wall of newsprint, 2x4 meters, for example, and called the group’s “mind map.” In other words, what are the trends in the larger environment that will have an effect, good or bad, on what participants decide they want to do as a result of the “future search” conference. At the end of this session, participants are asked to identify seven of the trends they individually believe to be the most important by putting dots or marks next to each of these trends.

**DAY 2:** The second day is a full day of small group and plenary sessions with several tasks. The day’s activities start with stakeholder groups, e.g., elected officials, local government staff, and citizens, working in smaller groups to create their own version of the “mind map”, trends they consider most important to them. Then, each stakeholder working group identifies what it is doing currently, in relation to the conference topic, of which its members are (1) most proud and (2) most sorry. In other words, these perceptions of behaviour, good and bad, are made public and push the conference from “blaming and complaining” and toward taking responsibility for conditions as they are.

Before lunch the second day, participants convene in mixed groups to prepare statements of *ideal futures*. These groups, positioning themselves five, ten or even twenty years into the future, imagine their ideal future has come true. This task is completed by listing:

- 1) Concrete images and examples of what actually happened or how they got to this future state, and
- 2) The barriers that had to be overcome along the way.

These future scenarios are presented to the entire conference membership in any form the stakeholder group decides: drama, skit, TV news show, etc. Other group members record from these events the themes they hear that are also included in their own presentation and projects, events, and innovations they like best from what they hear and see. The creators of this approach to strategic planning (future search) emphasise the importance of making creative presentations at this point that involve many or all members of the group.

After the various scenarios are presented, each group comes up with three lists (on newsprint, of course):

1. **Common Future** - what they all agree they want – usually stated in value statements and other abstract terms
2. **Potential Projects** - programs, policies, etc., and
3. **Unresolved Differences** - recognising conflicts, disagreements that have not been resolved.

Regarding differences, the Native Americans have a wonderful saying about this aspect of life in general. *The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.*

The final task of the day is to have two groups come together and merge their lists into one. The groups are asked to put their final list of issues on individual cards or strips of paper so they can be rearranged the next morning into those from all the groups that are related.

**DAY 3:** The first task on the third and last day of work together is to reorganise all the ideas into similar themes, e.g., shared visions and values, potential actions, and differences to be resolved. Issues from the first two lists that seem to bother members of the group go onto the “unresolved differences” list.

The final task of the conference is to develop action plans. This usually involves two rounds of planning, each followed by group reports and discussions of commitments. The purpose of this last set of exercises is to agree on steps that can be taken as a group to work toward their common future agenda. The worksheets they develop include recommended

short-term actions (within the next three months) and long-term actions (next three years). Three specific needs are listed as well: *What Help Needed, From Whom and a Due Date.*<sup>4</sup>

### **Localising Agenda 21**

We have mentioned the work that UNCHS (Habitat) is doing with a number of secondary cities to enhance their capacity to sustain urban planning and management. The process, although not identified as strategic planning, has many of the elements found in other approaches. The Localising Agenda 21 planning strategy includes the following key steps:

- ***Awareness building and strategic development:*** initiating the process with broad-based consultation workshops to reach consensus on priority areas for action- and long-term vision
- ***Human resource development and institution building:*** strengthening the human capital of local government, allied public institutions, civic organisations and citizens to implement the vision
- ***Improving planning and management practices:*** through the development of tools to support implementation of pilot action plans
- Promoting public dialogue: through dissemination and exchange of experiences between towns facing similar problems.

When this process was initiated in Essaouira, Morocco, a coastal city founded in 1760, it involved an on-going series of facilitated workshops. These consultations were based on an assessment of challenges, e.g., decline of fishing industries and opportunities, e.g., growing interest in small scale, culturally sensitive eco-tourism. These assessment-based discussions not only resulted in a consensus vision of the community but priority areas for action. These action plans were backed by capacity building initiatives within local government and collaborating community-based organisations to assure their ability to carry out plans and sustain the development resulting from the plans.

The visioning process within the overall *Localising Agenda 21* programme is followed logically by action planning which concretises ways to transform the visions into reality. While it sounds like the visions are frozen in place, in reality they are dynamic, or should be. In Essaouira, the visions became secured through a “re-visioning” of the master plan of development. The big differences between strategic and tactical planning efforts are in breadth, scale and longevity. The Agenda 21 endeavours include the entire community, taking a holistic system approach to development and long-term change. They also integrate capacity building with project and program implementation.

### **Case study: Addressing economic decline through strategic planning**

One of the authors has had considerable experience in helping local government organisations and communities carry out strategic planning efforts. One of the more interesting experiences involved a regional planning commission in a medium-sized, Mid-West city in the United States. The commission asked one of the authors to help organise and conduct a strategic planning conference on economic development for the metropolitan area. The mission of the conference was:

*“To provide a forum within which public and private leaders in the Miami Valley could reach consensus on (a) the major economic development challenges and opportunities to be addressed within the next five years; and (b) a strategy for further consideration and action.”*

The conference was two days in length and involved just over 200 leaders representing public organisations, private corporations, neighbourhood groups, elected officials, non-profit agencies, the media, professional and business organisations, and agricultural associations.

A formal presentation and open discussion about the economic conditions of the metropolitan area initiated the conference. The past decade was reviewed in terms of: shifts in employment - several thousand jobs in primary manufacturing disappeared over a 7-8 year period; retail and service trends; and the role of support institutions, e.g., government, education, social service, during that period. The presentation, which was based on a research document, also framed the regional economy within the context of national and international economic trends and made certain projections about the near future.

Given this background information and data, each participant was asked to identify the five most important economic development challenges or opportunities facing the region at that time. For conference purposes, the terms challenge and opportunity were defined as follows:

**Challenge** - an economic circumstance, which is currently detrimental to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be eliminated or diminished; an economic liability.

**Opportunity** - an economic circumstance which, currently, is advantageous to the short-term and/or long-term viability of the region and needs to be exploited; an economic asset.

Twenty small work groups were formed with the task of discussing their individual lists for clarification and understanding and reaching a group consensus on the five most important economic development challenges and opportunities for the region. Each subgroup presented its list to a plenary session.

While there was a potential for 100 different issues, many were duplications and the final list involved thirty one discrete statements. These statements were organised by the workshop staff into a survey questionnaire during the late afternoon tea break. Following the break, each participant was asked (following the tea break and prior to adjourning for the day) to, once again, vote for what he or she considered the five most important from the combined list of thirty one. Participants were asked to rank order their choices on a scale of one to five: one being most important, two being next important, etc. The staff tabulated the results that evening by cumulative weight, e.g., a number one vote was given a weight of five, and by the number of individuals voting for any single statement of challenge or opportunity. From the voting results, eight issues were clearly top priority taking into account both methods of calculation.

On the following day, the results of the voting and tabulation were announced to the group. Eight work groups were formed to address each of the top priority issues identified in the previous day's sessions. Each participant was given an opportunity to self-select the topic he or she wanted to help address based on interest, experience and potential contribution to the topic's resolution. As it turned out, there was one very large group, several medium-sized groups and one with only a "handful" of participants. While this concerned the consultant, who tends to think groups of more than ten participants are a bit unwieldy and unproductive, each group performed to his expectations and satisfaction, and carried out the following tasks:

- identified the desired outcome of the challenge or opportunity their group was considering
- identified alternative courses of action that could be taken to achieve the desired outcome, and
- developed an action plan for achieving the desired outcome or goal.

Each work group reported its recommendations to the total membership of the conference toward the end of the second and final day. At that time, there were discussions about each of the recommendations and proposed action plans. Decisions were made to assign responsibilities to specific officers and organisations to begin implementing the recommendations.

Final conference proceedings were published and made available to participants and a wide range of citizens and organisations in the region. The strategic economic development plan, forged in those two hectic days of discussion, became both policy and a work plan for the regional planning commission. In a return visit to the region nearly a year later, the consultant learned that many of the recommendations had already been implemented while others were still in progress.

As you can see, there are many templates to be considered when planning to carry out a strategic planning process. They all have some common features: inclusion, future orientation, a facilitated process, and opportunities for participants to create their own vision of what they would like the future to be.

### **Reflection time**

Think about initiating a strategic participatory planning process in your community. What would be the triggering event? What time frame would you recommend, remembering that the horizon for most strategic plans is at least five years in the future, and often more? As a final step in this reflection exercise, sketch out a workshop design that you believe would produce a quality strategic plan for your community.

### **Pit stop**

*The mayor and facilitator just returned from a meeting with another elected chief executive who had provided the leadership to organise and conduct a strategic planning process for his city organisation. While their effort had focused only on the future of the city government organisation, he believed it would have been much more "powerful" as a visioning experience if they would have made it a community wide endeavour. This certainly confirmed what the Mayor had heard at the UNCHS Conference. She and the facilitator decided on the way home that any effort to prepare a strategic plan for the city should be community wide. By this they meant including a broad spectrum of*

*organisations and individuals from the larger community, not just members of the “official city family” and a few carefully chosen friends.*

*The facilitator suggested to the mayor that she appoint a small working committee to help plan the strategic planning process. In addition to the city government, he suggested she consider: an officer in an influential and respected NGO, an active community worker, the chairperson of the local chamber of commerce, and a representative of the largest industry in the city. As he said to the mayor, “This is a committee to help you decide how to carry out a strategic planning process, not the people who would prepare such a plan, although they might ultimately be members of such a group.”*

*The planning committee met, discussed with the mayor her expectations and desired outcomes from the planning process, and made a number of key decisions. These included: who should be involved, when and where to hold the sessions, the role of the facilitator, the design of the workshop, and, of course, the overall goal and objectives to be achieved.*

*The facilitator showed the committee some materials on different approaches to strategic planning and they decided to design their own workshop based in large part after something called Future Search and to introduce the Localising Agenda 21 programme as a potential project. They also suggested to the facilitator that some time be spent in the workshop discussing the neighbourhood planning process that had been initiated to resolve the potential ethnic conflict that was brewing in their midst.*

### ***From reaching out to focusing in***

Before we start to *focus in*, here are some concluding thoughts on reaching out as the key to strategic planning. An essential part of strategic planning is to confront where we are, why we are where we are, and what keeps us from moving on to a better place.

Karl Weick tells the story of a group of hikers who got lost in a severe snowstorm in the Swiss Alps. They were stranded and on the verge of giving up hope when one of them found a map in his backpack. Mobilised by new possibilities, they mustered their energy and found their way back to civilisation. After they had returned home safely, they discovered that the map they had used to escape their potential tragedy was of the Pyrenees, not the Alps!

As Wayne Gretzky, one of the world’s premier hockey players, said when asked about the secret of his success, “I skate to where I think the puck will be.” So it will be when you engage in successful strategic planning.

### ***Focusing in***

If effective strategic planning is dependent, in large measure, on participant’s ability to project themselves into the future through visioning, action planning is very much dependent on a focusing in process that is problem-centered. While strategic planning tends to use the telescope to see as far into the future as possible, action planners go for the microscope. Let’s look at how they use that metaphorical microscope.

No step can be as difficult in the participatory planning process as *finding the problem*. By this we mean the real problem, not a symptom, or worse yet – a solution masquerading as a problem. There are times when the problems we face are crystal clear. No one questions them, and they can be addressed directly. Probably these kinds of problems would not find their way into a participatory planning process. There are other times, however, when problems are fuzzy, ambiguous, and difficult to describe. They even go around posing as something else. Typically, these are the kinds of problems that get delegated to participatory planning teams. Let’s look briefly at the challenge of deciding whether the participatory planning team has been handed a problem, symptom or solution.

Problems are those things that keep the local government or the community from getting from where they are to where they want to be. This suggests that where it wants to be is known, which is not always the case. For this and other reasons, defining end results - what would the problem look like if it were solved? - becomes an important task early in the problem solving process. Without knowing where we want to go, it is difficult to determine (1) how we will get there and (2) whether or not we have arrived.

Another difficulty in identifying problems is the tendency for problems to mask themselves as symptoms or even solutions. Symptoms are visible aspects of a problem that often bring the problem to our attention. Symptoms rarely explain a problem; they are only manifestations of the problem. For example, a headache is a symptom of something else. The problem could be eyestrain which, in turn, may be a symptom of something else - a problem within a problem. We could treat the headache, but the next time we begin to read the newspaper, the problem returns. Effective problem solvers need to dig beneath the surface where symptoms reside if satisfactory results are to be achieved. Solutions also masquerade as problems. Often, just asking the question, “Is this a problem, symptom or solution?” will quickly get the discussion back on track.

One way for a planning team to understand what they have been handed as a challenge is to ask a series of simple questions. This set of queries is perhaps the easiest way to understand whether you have a problem, a symptom, or a solution and whether or not you want to do something about it. Sometimes the best option is not to solve the problem.

### **Asking questions**

At a very early stage in the participatory planning process, team members need to find out just why they have been assembled. Sounds a bit strange but not unrealistic. Or better yet, the facilitator should be able to determine this in the initial contracting session. Just in case there is a lack of clarity about the problem to be addressed or solved, here are some questions that can be helpful.

1. **What is the real problem?** Don't be fooled by symptoms and solutions that go around dressed like problems.
2. **Why is it a problem? Or, what is causing the problem?** This question will often help the team to look at cause-effect relationships, or the identification of symptoms. What the team will be undertaking is a process of inquiry sometimes known as the **repetitive why analysis**.

*By the way, we will be using the term problem, but this doesn't exclude thinking in terms of issues, concerns or even opportunities, as triggering mechanisms that lead us to action planning. If it helps, just substitute whatever term is more appropriate.*

3. **Why should the problem be solved?** If this question can't be answered, there may not be a problem worth pursuing.
4. **When and where is it a problem?** These questions help pinpoint the source, or sources, of the problem.
5. **Whose problem is it?** This is the beginning of a set of "who?" type inquiries. For example, who else would be interested in solving the problem? Would they be willing to contribute to its solution? Who might be opposed to solving the problem? This last question seems a bit odd to ask, but it can provide another perspective in the team's efforts to understand the problem. *If you haven't noticed already, these questions are also useful in identifying potential stakeholders.*
6. **What would happen if the problem weren't solved?** Sometimes the best solution to a problem is no solution.
7. **Once again, what is the problem?** After answering all these questions, you may very well have a new definition of your problem or perhaps no problem, or at least one worth spending time on.

These questions, when taken seriously, can trigger a flow of information that will not only help the participatory planning team understand the complexity of the problem but begin to reveal options for addressing the problem.

You may think we have interjected this task into the participatory planning process too early. Good observation: after all, it is part of the fact-finding and analysis responsibility of the planning team that will be assembled. However, we have a rationale for moving it up in the sequence of events. It is to encourage those who are responsible for putting the planning team together to also think through the problem, issue, concern, or opportunity before they hand it over to others. The clearer they are about the issue to be addressed, the easier it will be for the planning team to carry out their tasks with greater efficiency. This pre-problem finding expedition doesn't relieve the planning team of this task. They will also need to engage in problem finding when they have been given the planning responsibility.

### **Reflection time**

In one of the more recent Reflection boxes, we asked you to focus on one of the problems or opportunities you had identified earlier. Now, take that same statement and put it through the above set of inquiries.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

To be sure the description of the problem can be understood easily by others, apply the 3-C *Problem Definition test*.



### 3-C Problem definition test

**Clear:** Would someone not associated with the work of the participatory planning team understand your description of the problem?

**Concise:** Is the problem statement brief and to the point?

**Complete:** Has anything important for describing the problem been omitted? <sup>4</sup>

### **Key points**

- After the participatory planning process has been triggered by awareness and visions, and early partnerships have been formed, its time to either reach out and plan strategically, or focus in and come up with an action plan.
- Strategic and action planning require many of the same tools in their development but are accomplished by using different lenses in our decision-making bi-focals.
- There are many strategic planning models to pick from. We suggest you study them and then create your own based on your needs, resources and the collective interests of those who are responsible for planning the PP event.
- Visioning is a valuable strategic thinking, planning and acting tool. It should play a prominent role in any strategic planning process.
- When developing action plans, don't under estimate the power and the difficulty of finding your real problem, issue, concern or opportunity. Problems are notorious for masquerading as symptoms and, worse yet, solutions.
- The seven-question interrogation of your problem may be the best action-planning friend you will ever find.
- While its true that *reaching out* and *focusing in* are integral parts of the next phase of participatory planning, Fact-finding and Analysis, it is important for those who are assembling the planning teams and providing the resources for planning to go through these exercises before making final commitments.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Hamel, Gary, "Strategy as Revolution". *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1996, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Nanus, Burt and Stephen Dobbs. "Leaders Who Make a Difference". San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 1999, p. 87

<sup>3</sup> Friedman, John. "Retracking American: a Theory of Transactive Planning". New York: Doubleday, 1973, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Weisbrod, Marvin R. and Sandra Janoff. "Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organisations and Communities". San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995, Appendix C.

<sup>5</sup> This clear, concise and complete guide to problem definitions is attributed to Ana Vasilache who keeps her fuzzy headed friends somewhat honest around this task.

## CHAPTER 7

### PHASE IV: FACT FINDING AND ANALYSIS

A problem well stated is a problem half solved  
**CHARLES F. KETTERING**

Phase III of the participatory planning process is that point in the process when decisions are made to either:

- (1) **reach out** and engage the organisation or community in taking a strategic look at the future, or
- (2) **focus in** and proceed with an action-planning approach designed to produce more immediate results.

The decision is usually driven by the triggering event. For example, the Mayor or other local leader has a vision about what he or she wants the community to achieve over a sustained period of time and decides to involve others in developing a strategic plan. Or a problem develops or an opportunity emerges in the organisation or community that needs to be addressed and can benefit from an action planning process involving other stakeholders from within the organisation, community, or wider sphere of participation.

We've come to a fork in the road. It looks like we will be taking either the strategic route, or the one marked action planning. But this *voyage of discovery* is never quite this simple. If you go down the strategic planning highway, you will be performing many of the tasks you would if you decided to engage in some immediate action planning. For example, strategic planning can involve another stakeholder analysis; perhaps pre-workshop data gathering and analysis, particularly about future trends, contracting with a facilitator, team-building activities when the process begins, determining goals rather than more specific objectives, and perhaps looking at options.

If the triggering event has put you on the action-planning route, you might even engage in some visioning before you travel too far. Of course, many of the steps just mentioned in terms of strategic planning would also apply.

There are two main differences that are distinctive about these two approaches to participatory planning. They are (1) time frames; and, (2) the specificity of details. Strategic planning involves longer timeframes although even the experts can't agree on what is optimum. Most specialists in strategic planning, when asked what an ideal timeframe is for strategic planning, will say, "It all depends." The *Future Search* approach outlined in the previous chapter suggests three years for the long-term actions. Other writers and practitioners gasp at the thought, much preferring time spans of ten, fifteen, or twenty years for thinking strategically.

Our suggestion, in terms of deciding the time context of your strategic plan, is to make a collective decision based on the overall goal you hope to achieve as a result of your strategic plan being implemented. Do what you want to do rather than adhere to some arbitrary time frame recommended by an outside expert. If you are part of a newly elected local government body and you want a blueprint of what your elected council expects to accomplish, and the next election is four years hence, you will probably opt for a four-year strategic plan.

Time frames for action planning events, by contrast, should be driven by a sense of urgency both in terms of how long the planning process takes and how long implementation should take to carry out the actions that are recommended.

The second variable is how specific the planners are in stating what the plan will include and how it will be implemented. The longer the time frame, the less specific one can be about what is to be done to achieve concrete objectives. A strategic plan with a twenty year time frame will be necessarily vague about who will be doing what with whom and how long it will take as the plan approaches the mid-way mark of ten years.

On the other hand, an action plan to deal with a burgeoning AIDS epidemic among teenagers can hardly be vague about what will happen immediately even though the strategic goal to reduce the infection rate by X percent covers, for example, a ten year time frame. That goal would be dependent on actions being taken as quickly as possible and based on the planning teams recommendations.

#### ***Fact-finding and analysis: Going back-and moving forward***

The label we have given this Phase of the participatory planning process may be a bit confusing. We have already asked you to engage in some fact-finding ventures prior to reaching this point in the process. For example, the contracting step in *building productive partnerships* (Phase II) and the process of either *reaching out* or *focusing in* (Phase III) involve some fact finding and analysis. These ambiguities confirm our earlier comments that this process can be a bit *messy* at times. While it does progress through a series of logical steps, either as a process of strategic or

action planning, these processes call for considerable tolerance in moving the boundaries of each phase a bit, and even being prepared to shuffle them on occasion as we implement the process.

This is also the stage in the participatory planning process when the planning team that has been assembled will begin to work directly on its assigned tasks. In other words, the responsibility for implementing the planning process, whether its overall goal is developing a strategic plan or a more immediate action plan, will shift from those who were involved more directly in initiating the process to those who will develop the plan. Given this shift in planning responsibilities, we urge you to replicate the steps in the processes outlined in the previous chapter (Phase III). In terms of strategic planning, we have in mind the visioning step; and for action planning, the problem-finding step.

However, those responsible for each of these planning mandates might want to engage in both of these steps depending on what triggered the formation of the participatory planning initiative. (See Part II of the Manual for more directions and forms to help you learn how to adapt these steps to achieve your planning objectives).

### **Returning to the pit stop**

In order to simplify our discussion of the next stages of the participatory planning process, we will return to the *action planning* example we have been following in the case study as described under the passages entitled: *Pit Stop*. We will assume the mayor's strategic planning workshop was successful in forging a community vision that was consistent with her goal of undertaking the Localising Agenda 21 programme. And, that the neighbourhood action-planning process that we will continue to follow is both compatible with the mayor's long-term goal and can serve as a role model for planning future projects that can benefit from interaction between the local government and community organisations and citizens. Given these caveats, let's take a look at the next stage in the systematic approach to participatory planning.

Somewhere between the initiating phase of the participatory planning process, which assumes the need for an external facilitator, and the fact-finding and analysis phase, what some would call diagnosis, many things will need to happen in terms of the case study we have been following. This will also be true of any PP process you set in motion within your community. Among the most critical will be the tasks of making contact with the neighbourhood in distress and putting the planning team together. Many of the concepts and strategies discussed in the last chapter will be relevant to these tasks. As members of the mayor's initiating team get in touch with both sides of the neighbourhood controversy, they will be challenged to put their "contracting" skills to work.

### **Reflection time**

Put yourself in the shoes of the CBO neighbourhood worker. You have just been drawn into a situation where you will be called upon to provide leadership beyond the scope of your current organisation's mandate. Remember, your CBO runs a day care centre for single parents. What will you do to address the potential ethnic conflict that is developing in the neighbourhood?

While we are attempting to give you the essence of what happens in each stage of participatory planning, we also realise that each attempt to engage in action planning will be different in size, character, issues, and people involved. Because of these variables and others, we can only hope to provide a general roadmap for your use and to explain why there are stops to be made along this journey of discovery.

### **The art and science of analysis**

The *fact-finding and analysis phase of participatory planning* applies to both strategic and tactical planning endeavours and is conducted in different ways based on the overall goal to be achieved in the process. In the case study presented earlier about developing a regional strategic plan for economic development, a comprehensive analysis of various factors and indicators influencing the economic well-being of the region was conducted by the regional planning commission. Their report on jobs lost in a ten year period, shifts in public expenditures, unemployment trends and other quantifiable data was presented at the beginning of the conference to highlight the seriousness of the issues and to provide benchmarks for evaluating future success.

In another strategic planning workshop, facilitated by one of the authors, this phase of the PP process was carried out without benefit of pre-workshop research. The participants were all senior field officials of a worldwide church related disaster relief organisation and had extensive knowledge of their past and current operations. The objectives of the workshop were to: (1) examine the basic assumptions underlying their operational strategy based on past and current results; (2) assess trends they believed would have an impact on the operation of their services in the future; and (3)

develop a new strategy for delivering future emergency response services, based on an evaluation of past experiences and current trends.

How we conduct the fact-finding and analysis phase of participatory planning as demonstrated by these two short examples will depend on the circumstances surrounding the need to be addressed. Nevertheless, this stage involves several steps to be taken and skills to learn and apply as you travel from initiating the process (Phase I) to actually planning a course of action (Phase V). Like the stakeholder analysis and contracting tasks, these steps are not always organised in a linear, lock-step fashion. For example, you may find yourself returning to previous steps in this phase of participatory planning to:

- be clear about what you are trying to accomplish in the participatory planning process, perhaps redefining the goals and objectives of the project as more stakeholders get involved
- collect more data based on an earlier analysis of information that was collected, or
- rethink options before prioritising them and inserting them into an action plan.

Or, you might decide that some of the following steps in fact-finding and analysis could be skipped. For example, there may not be viable options for implementation or the problem to be addressed is so clear and agreed upon by all stakeholders that engaging in *problem finding* would be a waste of time.

The fact-finding and analysis phase can be simple or complex depending on the problem or opportunity being considered. Nevertheless, we will assume it is a bit complicated. This provides us with the rationale to describe the full cycle of steps, or tasks, in the process. We will ask you to return to problem-finding as a team, the task described in Phase III; to collecting and analysing data; writing goal and objective statements; and determining options.

### **Step One: Problem finding**

As we said in the last chapter, no step in the PP process can be as difficult as finding the problem. We spelled out seven questions we believe are essential in focusing in on the problem or opportunity you have been given to explore as an action planning team. We want to list them again for two reasons: (1) they are critically important to achieving your mandate as decision makers and problem solvers; and (2) there is another list of queries which we believe is equally important to consider before pursuing your mandate further. First, a review of the *problem, or opportunity, finding* queries.

1. **What is the real problem?**
2. **Why is it a problem? Or, what is causing the problem?**
3. **Why should the problem be solved?**
4. **When and where is it a problem?**
5. **Whose problem is it?** *Also useful in identifying a potential stakeholders.*
6. **What would happen if the problem wasn't solved?**
7. Once again, **What is the problem?**

These questions will stimulate a flow of information that will not only help your team understand the complexity of the problem but begin to reveal options for achieving solution(s).

### **Finding the problem is only half this initial challenge**

Once the problem has been sufficiently identified or found, the diligent and responsible participatory planning team must decide whether or not an attempt should be made to solve the problem and how soon. Finding answers to the following questions can help the participatory planning team reach a "go or no go" decision.

(By the way, you may have noticed that we used the phrase diligent and responsible to describe your team. Some teams might say, "It's not our responsibility to decide whether to solve the problem or to pursue the opportunity. That's management's problem! Our task is to design a way to do it." We take a different point of view. If the problem or opportunity doesn't measure up to these follow-up criteria questions, we believe it's the teams' responsibility to so inform those who authorised the PP process before going any further).

- **How urgent is it to find a solution to the problem?** A problem is *urgent* if it requires immediate attention to avert a crisis.
- **How important is it to find a solution to the problem?** A problem is *important* if neglecting it could result in serious consequences for the future of the organisation or community.
- **How feasible is it to solve the problem?** Some problems can't be solved with existing levels of technology. Or, they may require a financial investment that far exceeds the capabilities of the local government and community.
- **Is it within the control of the local government and community to solve the problem?** The cause of the problem may be outside the legal jurisdiction or political influence of the community and local government. Or the solution may depend on the approval of individuals and organisations that have little interest in solving the problem, or perhaps have an interest in preventing its resolution.
- **Are team members willing to make a personal commitment to solve the problem?** Solving problems, particularly those being looked at through a participatory planning process, may call for a sizeable investment of time, other resources and even on occasion personal risk. If participatory planning team members can't answer this question in the affirmative, the possibility that others who are not involved in the discussion would make a commitment to solve the problem could be even less.

This set of questions can be equally effective in determining if an opportunity given to the participatory planning team for consideration has a chance to succeed and meet the expectations of those involved in the exploration. In this case, using the future tense (i.e., how urgent will it be...) to frame your inquiries might help the discussion make more sense.

### ***Pit stop***

*The last time we looked in on the chairperson, facilitator, and neighbourhood worker, they were having coffee and tying down some more expectations, wants and needs in terms of their social contract to work together. They were also beginning to think through their neighbourhood intervention and participatory planning process. We will assume that they have successfully made contact with the neighbours in the problematic area of the city. And, of course, the neighbours they contacted, and convinced to be represented on the planning team, include those who just moved in from the farm and those who are concerned about the continued quality of life in their neighbourhood.*

*In addition, the team includes:*

- *city government representatives such as a member of the planning staff*
- *a local priest who grew up in this part of town and is known for his conciliation skills, and*
- *a businessman from another part of town who is looking to expand his workforce and has a reputation for being civic minded.*

*The team had its meeting and is reasonably clear about what it thinks the problem is as a result of a very successful "problem-finding" exercise conducted by the team facilitator. At this point, the team is beginning to put together a plan to collect more data on the problem.*

#### **In the meantime**

*While the neighbourhood team is trying to focus in, the mayor is garnering broad support within the community for her up-coming strategic planning workshop or conference. Since she wants to keep the planning process open-ended and not focused on a specific issue like economic development or the welfare of children, she has decided not to conduct any data gathering and diagnostic activities that would focus the discussion. She wants those charged with creating a future vision for the city to be free in their discussions about what that future might look like.*

*Instead, the mayor, facilitator and a small planning team including representatives of major sectoral interests of the city like commercial businesses, health institutions, education, NGO organisations, and industry have been busy identifying all the crucial stakeholders who need to be included in the strategic planning process. In addition, they have been discussing the goal and objectives of the workshop and how it will be designed and conducted to achieve a future vision statement and broad mandates to fulfil the vision over an extended period of time. While they have decided not to focus on any specific issues in their strategic planning process, they have decided to include two presentations at the beginning of the workshop. The first would be by a futurist from a local university. He would talk about technological, social and economic trends he believes will have an impact on the future of the city. The second presentation would be by a mayor from a city in the region that is implementing an Agenda 21 programme. As the*

*strategic planning, “planning” team worked together, they realised that many of the diagnostic tools discussed in this chapter could be useful in conducting the strategic planning exercise.*

**Step Two: Data collection**

The planning team has several options when it comes to gathering information, data and ideas to help in its planning efforts. All have their potential advantages and disadvantages. The options are:

1. **Interviews**
2. **Questionnaires**
3. **Combining Interviews and Questionnaires**
4. **Document analysis**
5. **Direct observation**
6. **The team’s experience and intuition.**

<p><b>Interviews.</b> The team can conduct individual or group interviews. They can be open-ended and unstructured or based on a structured schedule of questions.</p>	<p><b>Advantages.</b> The information can be very rich and provide insights that other approaches can’t. Interviews can unearth new data, particularly when they are conducted effectively. Group interviews help individuals build on the thoughts of others. As important as the data may be from interviews, the personal contacts can be invaluable, particularly when undertaking a participatory process. It extends the net of participation, builds trust, and increases ownership and understanding among those involved.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages.</b> Interviews can be costly and time consuming. Often it is difficult to interpret and quantify the data since it may be subjective. Interview data may not be comparable unless the questions to be asked are designed and administered with considerable care.</p>
<p><b>Questionnaires.</b> The use of surveys and questionnaires can generate a lot of data quickly.</p>	<p><b>Advantages.</b> They are relatively inexpensive, can involve large numbers of citizens, and assure confidentiality if designed and administered effectively, which predicts more honest responses as well. Finally, the responses to questionnaires can be counted or quantified which may be important in determining the level of commitment or understanding from those queried.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages.</b> The response rate can be low, particularly in certain sectors of the community, thus reflecting only the opinions of those who answer. The responses are only as good as the questions. In other words, the questions sometimes reflect the bias of the person(s) responsible for designing them. There can be a tendency to over-interpret the results by reading into them more than is there.</p>

**Combining interviews and questionnaires.** There is a method the team can use to combine interviews and questionnaires. It involves asking open-ended questions to a representative sample of various stakeholders, remembering how broadly we defined stakeholders earlier in the discussion. The questions can be as broad as: What do you like about the community or in the case of our planning team, the neighbourhood? What don’t you like about the community? What changes would you like to see to improve the community?

The declarative statements are then organised into categories of responses and the most clear and reflective statements from those interviewed are put into a questionnaire to be administered more broadly within the community. This questionnaire can ask after each statement the extent to which the person agrees or disagrees with the statement. The data is assembled, mean averages calculated, and the results fed back to the citizens. This approach can be very effective in reflecting the real attitudes of the community since it is based on the shared perceptions of their neighbours, has validity, and can quickly create an agenda for change.

<p><b>Document analysis.</b> Based on what the team is looking for, this can be an effective method of data collection. Obviously, it works best when there are data files that provide trails of comparable information over extended time periods.</p>	<p><b>Advantages.</b> It can be inexpensive and objective and paint a realistic picture of trends over time. If the participatory planning team were instructed to consider options for increasing economic development within the community, it would be useful to study employment trends by various categories over relatively long periods of time. Not only would these data suggest shifts in employment patterns, they could be projected into the future with varying degrees of reliability.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages.</b> It is dependent on a sound and accessible database which may not be available. It also reflects what has happened, not necessarily why it has happened.</p>
<p><b>Direct observation.</b> The participatory planning team can, through direct observation, determine what is actually happening in the community. For example, if the citizens of a specific neighbourhood are complaining about drug trafficking, it is possible to observe the situation firsthand.</p>	<p><b>Advantages.</b> The team members can observe what is actually happening, not just rely on what others are saying is happening. New observations by outsiders can provide new insights that those living with the behaviours every day might miss. The appearance of the team in the community could increase the validity of its recommendations if the rationale and intentions behind the observations are authentic.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages.</b> This can be a very expensive, time-consuming and selective data gathering process. The presence of the participatory planning team can affect the behaviour being observed, and there is always the chance that what is observed one day may be an exception. Of course, there is always the possibility of observer bias. Sometimes we see what we want to see.</p>
<p><b>Experience and intuition of the team.</b> This is the most immediate source of data and information. If the team has been assembled with care to reflect different points of view, different life and work experiences, and different demographics, the information base can be rich and revealing.</p>	<p><b>Advantages.</b> It is immediate and personal with no need for permission to gather the information. It creates a base for discussion and can be challenged.</p> <p><b>Disadvantages.</b> It is subjective, open to bias, sometimes difficult to feed back to others without getting a defensive response, and can be discounted more easily by those who are sceptical.</p>

**Data compilation and analysis.** Whatever your mode of information gathering, you will need to do something with it. Our advice is to:

- compile it. Assemble it in one place, if possible
- sort it into categories based on your data needs;
- set aside what is not relevant to what you are trying to accomplish, or the volume may overwhelm you
- analyse it in order to understand what it means in terms of your goals and objectives, and
- use it for decision making and documentation.

### Step Three: Problem analysis

As suggested earlier, there is a tendency in the problem-solving process to pursue *symptoms*, mini-problems masquerading as the real thing, or to jump to conclusion solutions. In the first case, the symptom may be solved, but the problem continues to exist. When the solutions are defined as problems, they immediately eliminate all other options for problem solving. More importantly, jumping to solutions may have you chasing after the wrong problem or no problem at all.

Analysis is the bridge between identifying the problem or opportunity and planning a course of action. Problem and opportunity finding, as in asking all those questions about the problem, begins the analysis stage of problem solving. Gathering information and data, using one or all of the techniques just described, can deepen your understanding of the problem or opportunity.

Problem analysis has three sub-steps: (1) taking all the data and information gathered in the last step and making sense out of it; (2) translating the problem into an objective; and (3) analysing the forces working for and against the fulfilment of the objective.

Before going any further, let's talk about this sequence of events since it may be somewhat confusing. The confusion is justified. We know! Every time we sit down to write about the decision making/problem solving/planning approach, we also get a bit confused. Some management specialists - and we refer to them since decision making and problem solving are considered management tasks - would advocate turning the problem or opportunity into a goal or objective statement *before data collection*. Given this approach, they would have data collection follow the writing of goals and objectives.

We disagree with their sequencing because we have seen too many managers and other problem solvers jump to conclusions. In other words, they decide what the problem would look like if solved before the problem is really understood. That is essentially what a goal or objective statement reflects. As we have been saying repeatedly, and no doubt boring you with the message, the problem as you initially name it may be only a symptom or more problematic, a solution. That's why we are advocating the sequence of problem finding - data gathering - data analysis - and, then goal and objective writing before further analysis.

### **The art of writing objectives**

Defining objectives and putting them into descriptive words that clearly state what you want to accomplish is another difficult task in the action planning process. It requires a kind of discipline that some of the other steps do not. Despite being a difficult task, it is crucial to effective decision making. While the word objective is defined in many ways, we like to keep it simple. *An objective is a statement of the outcome you want to accomplish.*

At this point, we can expect a question that sounds something like this. "But what is a goal?" Goals, from our perspective, are super-ordinate objectives. They are bigger statements of intent, more global in scope and tend to be stated in less precise terms. Goals may include a number of objectives under the umbrella that will help in their achievement. A statement of the goal to be accomplished should probably precede every set of objectives. Now, back to our discussion of objectives.

An objective that is well written or stated meets most or all of the following criteria:

- It is *specific*. It states what is to be accomplished as succinctly as possible.
- It *states an end result*, not an activity.
- It must *be something the individual, group, organisation is committed to do* - otherwise, it will have a tendency to slip away.
- It is *measurable*. We must be able to know when we reach it and be able to determine our progress toward it. Can we time it, count it, measure it, complete it?
- It *has a target completion date*. The absence of a date by which the objective is to be met is a license to ignore it.
- It is *attainable within the time available*.
- It is *largely within our control*. Without some control, it is difficult to assure that the objective will be accomplished. While it is recognised that many things about any objective may be outside of our control, it is important to minimise outside influence or interference.

The biggest challenge when writing objectives is to state them in such a way that we will know whether or not we are succeeding in their attainment in our planning and implementation efforts. Objectives that are vaguely worded or include several purposes make implementing them difficult if not impossible.

### **Analysing the environment and forces**

Once we have defined where we want to go, our objective, it is time to analyse the environment surrounding that objective and the changes to be brought about. If you are already familiar with the participatory planning process, you have probably encountered SWOT analysis. It is less likely that you have heard about force *field analysis*. The SWOT acronym stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunity and threats. The S and W usually refer to the organisation itself while the O and T refer to the organisation's external environment. Because of this orientation to organisations, SWOT analysis is better suited to action planning that is confined to organisational issues and concerns. Force field analysis



(FFA) is uniquely designed to look at issues and concerns that cut across organisational boundaries. We suggest you become familiar with both tools and decide which one will best serve the needs of your PP team.

### **SWOT analysis**

SWOT analysis is a relatively simple process. Your team will want to compile four lists of factors associated with the implementation of your stated objectives. The first two describe the strengths and weaknesses of the implementing organisation as they relate to the objectives. The last two are more concerned with the opportunities and treats associated with the external environment. These four factors are usually stated in the following ways:

- (1) What are the organisation's *strengths*?
- (2) What are the organisation's *weaknesses*?
- (3) What opportunities now exist or are likely to exist soon that could be taken advantage of in implementing the objectives we have identified?
- (4) What are current or potential threats to the implementation of our objectives?

### **Force field analysis**

Force field analysis is the older of the two tools, has stood the test of time, and incidentally provided the conceptual framework for the development of the SWOT methodology. We will describe it in some depth for those who may not have come across it before. If you have had close encounters of the force field kind, feel free to scroll ahead to more interesting things.

Kurt Lewin, a social scientist who enjoyed some of his most productive years during the middle decades of the twentieth century, designed some of our best decision making and problem solving concepts and strategies. One of the most durable tools he designed is what he called *force field analysis*. Lewin discovered that you could take any situation that a group, organisation or community would like to change and identify a field of forces - political, social, organisational – that keep them from achieving their intended objectives. The forces are of two kinds: driving forces, those that push us towards our objectives, and restraining forces, those that stand as obstacles. In Figure 6, these forces are displayed as right-to-left vectors for forces that will impede change and left-to-right vectors for forces favourable to the intended change.

At the level where these vectors meet is the point of equilibrium (the status quo). The status quo is held in tension by the opposing forces, but is quite susceptible to shifts. An unbalancing of forces (i.e., shortening or eliminating the vectors) can cause the equilibrium to shift either in the direction of the objective or in the opposite direction, indicating slippage.

Driving forces are what local governments, for example, have working for them to meet their objectives. Restraining forces are obstacles that stand in the way. Problem solvers need to determine how to unbalance the forces and shift the equilibrium in the desired direction. Three processes are involved:

1. **Diagnosis.** Identify the major driving and restraining forces. In SWOT terms, these would be strengths and weaknesses or opportunities and threats, depending on their application.
2. **Unfreezing.** Changing the different strengths of the individual forces, both pro and con.
3. **Redefining.** Re-freezing the situation as Lewin so dramatically puts it by stabilising the forces at a new, desired level.

It is helpful to assess the relative strength and weakness of each force. One technique would be to give the driving and restraining forces each a value of 100 points and then divide these 100 points among the forces on either side of the status quo. Once their relative individual strengths have been assessed, there are three strategies for bringing about change.

1. **Add to the driving forces.** This generally is the least desirable since adding driving forces usually results in more opposing forces which increases tension.
2. **Remove or reduce restraining forces.** This is usually more desirable and less obvious.
3. **Add driving forces and eliminate or reduce restraining forces.** This is probably the most frequently used strategy.

### Guidelines for using force field analysis

Not all forces are easy to influence or change. Some are so rigid they are almost impossible to move. These factors need to be taken into account as you review:

1. Which of the forces should you dismiss as being impossible to change?
2. Which of the forces are most vulnerable to change?
3. Which of those are the most important?

Once the forces have been identified as significant and vulnerable to change, consider which ones you want to attempt to change. In this process, it is helpful to ask the following kinds of questions.

1. Who has access to or influence over the force you want to change?
2. Which force, if you change it, will trigger other forces? For example, influencing a key leader may automatically influence his or her followers.
3. What are the resources you have available or can mobilise to bring about the desired change?
4. Where do you have the most leverage to influence the forces?
5. What pockets of new resistance can be expected to develop as you begin to strengthen or diminish other forces? How can they be countered?
6. Who needs to be involved or informed to either lessen the resistance to change or to provide support for the change?

The force field analysis or SWOT analysis prepares you to carry out the next stage in the participatory planning process, *action planning*, because it begins to suggest various options or various ways to meet your objectives. It's time to check in on our imaginary PP team to observe their progress in this analysis phase of the process.

### **Pit stop**

*The tactical planning team decided to use several methods to collect data and information on the neighbourhood where the rural families had settled. Team members interviewed a large number of citizens, including those who had lived in the communities for many years as well as those who were recent arrivals. They also talked to business, church and civic leaders about the neighbourhood situation. In addition to the individual interviews, the planning team held three focus group discussions. One involved only the new arrivals, another consisting of residents who had lived in the neighbourhood over fifteen years, and the final group, a mixture of the two.*

*Because of the relatively small number of citizens living in the neighbourhood, the team decided not to construct and administer questionnaires. Members of the planning team who lived in the neighbourhood decided they would be more observant about what was happening in the neighbourhood and report back what they were seeing. The facilitator had some experience with participant-observation research methods and was able to help them identify specific activities and interactions to observe during the time they were spending in the neighbourhood.*

*Finally, the planning officer offered to look at city documents and other records to determine if the city had any experience with other ethnic groups in the past. He also looked at property evaluations, access to public services in all areas of the neighbourhood and patterns of employment for those in the area. As we can see, the planning team was thorough and creative in its efforts to learn more about the problems before they focused in on possible recommendations for the mayor and other key stakeholders.*

### **One final analytical note**

Generating options, when a participatory planning team has a lot of information, can become a trap. Trying to figure out all the various ways to solve a problem can be exciting. It can also give your team an excuse for indecision - "We haven't looked at all the alternatives yet." The challenge is to open the door to new ideas and new ways of doing things without becoming overwhelmed. Avoid allowing the "best" to become the enemy of the good.

Herbert Simon, who has written extensively about decision making in public settings, calls this the "satisficing" solution. As Simon says, it is impossible to:

- know all the options that are potentially available in any complex situation

- foretell future consequences accurately, although we must try to foresee the consequences of our decisions to the extent we can, and
- place a value on events that have not yet occurred.<sup>1</sup>

Given these realities, all decision making is imperfect and subject to limits of rationality. Having said this, and recognising the need to engage in “satisficing” decision making, it is important to resist the pressures that often force us to take the first available satisfactory solution to a problem. Finding new options to old problems is how the future gets invented.

### **Key points**

- The qualities that define fact-finding and analysis will depend on whether the planning to be accomplished is strategic or action-oriented
- Strategic planning is long-term, but the length of the term can vary depending on the circumstances. The time frame for action planning is more immediate
- Strategic plans tend to be more global and less specific in the actions they recommend. Action plans are more specific when describing the details of implementation
- Fact-finding and analysis includes problem finding, information and data collection, objectives writing, and determining the forces that will foster and hinder the pursuit of these objectives
- Problem finding not only includes better definition of the problem or opportunity but judgements about whether the problem is solvable or the opportunity attainable
- Data collection methods include interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, direct observation, and the team’s experience and intuition
- Writing objectives should adhere to the SMART code of scribing: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound
- Two analysis tools worth learning and using are SWOT Analysis and Force Field Analysis

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Simon, Herbert. “**Administrative Behaviour**” (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 179.

## CHAPTER 8

### PHASE V: PLANNING A COURSE OF ACTION

Planning is the design of a desired future and effective ways for bringing it about  
**RUSSELL ACKOFF**

In the Fact-Finding and Analysis Phase we concentrated on finding problems and opportunities; collecting information, ideas and data; and introducing analytical techniques. We also concentrated on writing objectives to reflect what the problems would look like if solved or the future state of opportunities if realised and how to analyse forces that influence the accomplishment of objectives. The SWOT analysis and the force field exercises, when integrated into the planning process and performed rigorously, should provide the basis for a plan of action.

The action planning or decision-making phase in the participatory planning process has six steps all designed to turn the team's objectives into viable recommendations and achievable actions.

**Step 1.** Since you may have too many good ideas for practical implementation, you will need to narrow the objectives and options you plan to recommend. Once this is done, integrate them into one overall strategic statement of what your plan will accomplish when implemented.

**Step 2.** Hold an informal discussion with key stakeholders who are not serving on your planning team and integrate their comments into the strategic statement if relevant. This is an opportunity to get last-minute feedback on your recommendations and build support for your proposed initiatives.

**Step 3.** Develop a detailed plan of action, the heart of this phase of participatory planning.

**Step 4.** Consider the potential consequences of your proposed actions.

**Step 5.** Explore the need and options for developing a contingency plan of action.

**Step 6.** Determine the sequence and flow of activities necessary to achieve your objectives.

Before going further, it will be helpful to distinguish what we mean by planning a course of action as it relates to the participatory planning processes we have been discussing. We also want to put the planning process into perspective one more time. Planning is very much a management, decision-making process as we have been describing it. This approach dispels any myth that planning is somehow a process that is optional and external to the decision making, problem solving responsibilities of an organisation's policy body and management team. This stage of planning is concerned with making decisions about how to implement the best options, how to achieve results and how to get things done.

*Planning a Course of Action* is not just associated with **action planning**. It can also be an integral step in **strategic planning**. This may create confusion so let's try to clear the air before moving on. There are some differences between how we carry out this stage in the participatory planning process as it relates to strategic planning and what we have been calling action planning. While strategic plans can have specific action plan attachments, they are not as common as they are in action planning. Action planning is, from the beginning, driven by the need to produce practical, step-by-step recommendations to address more immediate problems and opportunities. Strategic planning is driven by visions of the future. These visions can be and often are supported by broadly defined strategies of engagement. They might be called *action plans*.

While this manual has been written to stimulate both planning perspectives and endeavours, it started out to serve local government officials, civic organisations members and citizens who are frustrated by current events within their communities and wanted tools to help them work more effectively together. The initial intent was to produce concepts and tools to help local government and community leaders work more effectively together in planning local actions.

Action plans become more powerful when they are compatible with and integrated into the fabric of a long-term strategic plan. We all have experiences of being involved in making short-term decisions that become long-term disasters. If strategic plans are conceptual maps of the future, action plans are the roads that take us into that future with assurance and integrity.

Now, it's time to check in with our action planning neighbourhood team to see how they are coping with this stage of the planning process.

The participatory planning team has been hard at work interviewing people, reviewing documents, holding meetings

in the community and keeping the mayor and her staff fully informed about their actions and progress. Like most planning efforts of this kind, the team was receiving lots of ideas and advice about what the city, citizens and civic organisations might do to defuse neighbourhood tensions and work toward sustainable solutions. Team members also experienced some tension within their own ranks when they started to focus on recommended actions, but they were able to overcome it with the facilitator's help.

The team's relationship with the neighbourhood was tense at first with considerable suspicion on both sides of the controversy about the team's "real agenda." The team was able to overcome most of the tension by being open, by reaching out often to involve community members in its deliberations, and by keeping them informed. As one team member commented, "The training we had in contracting, which I thought was a bit strange at the time, turned out to be useful in many ways." If one word could be used to define the relationship between the planning team and the community, it would be trust - trust that flowed in both directions.

At this point in its work, the team focused on the important issues, deciding what recommendations it would be making to the mayor, council and staff of the city, and to the community, specifically the key stakeholders in the neighbourhood at risk. They realised a few clear statements of actions that can be implemented successfully are worth far more than a comprehensive document that may describe every detail but not result in any actions. Team members also realised no one wants to be surprised by their recommendations, most of all, the mayor and the neighbourhood residents. Given this, the team took very seriously the tasks of being specific and realistic in their recommendations and open in its relationships with the major stakeholders.

The mayor was also busy during this time, recognising she had the will of the community behind her in initiating an Agenda 21 Programme. The broad cross section of community leaders who participated in the two-day strategic planning workshop had adopted a vision statement that emphasised the importance of sustainable development. She and her staff were drafting a recommendation for city council's consideration that would include formal adoption of the Agenda 21 principles and the formation of an advisory committee to assist in the planning implementation of future Agenda 21 programme activities. The committee would include key city professional staff members, representatives of private sector and NGO organisations, neighbourhood groups and citizens.

### **Reflection time**

Think about experiences you have had in either making decisions for others to implement or implementing decisions others have made. What actions could have been taken to make either of these decision-making experiences more effective?

### **Step One: Narrowing the options**

While most participatory planning efforts, like the one we have been following, will result in many options for possible consideration, this is the time to exercise discipline. It's not a bad idea to run each of the options you are considering through the force field analytical wringer one more time.

In Phase IV we outlined a number of criteria to consider when making a problem-or opportunity-related decision. They include urgency, importance, feasibility, commitment, and control of resources. The following are more questions to be answered when making recommendations as part of the action plan.

- Does the action being recommended support the objective(s) to be achieved?
- Is the recommended action realistic or feasible to implement?
- Are the resources required to implement the action either available already or attainable within a reasonable time frame?
- Will the recommended action be adequate to achieve the stated objective or to support its achievement when combined with other actions?
- Will the critical stakeholders make a commitment to support the action and work for its implementation?
- If the recommended actions require on-going efforts by any of the stakeholders, can these efforts be sustained?

- Can the proposed actions stand the scrutiny of openness and accountability?
- Will the team and others be able to evaluate the impact of the proposed actions?

### **Step Two: Confirmation and ownership**

Before the final options are put into an action plan, it is important to brief major stakeholders one more time about what is being considered. As we said before, no one likes surprises, especially elected officials and community leaders. It's also an opportunity to get further feedback and to increase local government and citizen ownership and commitment to the planned activities.

### **Step Three: Detailing the plan**

Action planning is the art of recommending actions that will be supported and implemented. In this action-planning step, the key discipline is *specificity*. For each action recommended, the plan should outline the following details:

- **What steps are required to implement the proposed action?**
- **Who will take primary responsibility for each action?** Someone needs to be in charge!
- **Who else needs to be involved?** During the participatory planning meetings, there were contacts and involvement of key stakeholders. Their involvement may need to continue. Many actions require collaboration even though someone from another organisation might be in charge. Who are the significant others?
- **What resources will be needed to carry out each action?** These can include people, materials, money, equipment, and skills.
- **When will each action be complete?** This includes not only how much time will be required but also a realistic date for completion.
- **How will you know progress is being made toward carrying out each action?** How will you know whether the proposed actions are contributing to the realisation of the intended results?
- **How will the final and ongoing impact of the recommended actions be assessed?**

### **Step Four: Considering consequences**

While the need to consider consequences of proposed actions was raised, somewhat indirectly in previous steps, it becomes a direct task at this point. Potential consequences to your recommended actions may take many forms. Here is one example of a potential consequence that has nothing to do with the validity of your proposed action and everything to do with the psychological mindsets of those whom you plan to recommend as the implementers.

After identifying two organisations you think should be responsible for implementing certain phases of the project or program, someone on your planning team points out that these particular agencies have a reputation of not cooperating with each other. At this point in the development of your action plan, you might want to consider some options to mitigate the negative consequences of involving the two organisations. For example, should you recommend that only one of the two be involved in implementation based on their past history of non-cooperation? Should you alter your proposed action steps to involve them both but to minimise the potential for conflict between them? Or, should you recommend ways to help them gain new understanding and skills in working together? Such options would also need to be assessed in terms of their potential consequences.

Consequences come in all forms, shapes and sizes. Some are beneficial; others are detrimental. Some are planned; others unplanned. Some consequences are global; others are very local. Here are a few to keep in mind as the action plan is assembled.

- What will be the extra-territorial economic, social, political, environmental, and even cultural consequences of implementing the proposed plan of action? These are the ones that spill across community borders affecting others.
- What might be the short-term and long-range consequences of implementing your plan? Will positive long-term consequences outweigh short-term negative ones? Or, will short-term, positive gains be overwhelmed by long-term, adverse consequences?

- What might be the consequences for those organisations that are being recommended as implementing agencies? Will they be stretched too thin given these new recommended responsibilities? Will they have an opportunity to learn how to work more effectively with others as a result of their participation?
- What will be the long-term financial and other resource costs to the local government and community if the recommendations are implemented?
- What might be the consequences of civic organisations, local governments, and citizens working in concert to implement your proposed plans? Will there be more tension or a spirit of collaboration that is currently missing in the community?

Some consequences can never be predicted. Others can never be planned out of future existence. Nevertheless, it is important to project yourselves into the near future to consider what you are setting in motion. The challenge in preparing an action plan is to consider how implementers will be able to achieve planned and intended consequences while coping with unplanned and unintended consequences. Every action plan, when implemented, will have consequences. It's better to recognise what they might be as early as possible.

### ***Step Five: Contingency plans***

Anyone who has been involved in planning complex operations or carrying out activities where there is an element of risk to be considered will have heard of the need for contingency plans. Airline pilots routinely develop contingency plans based on the potential of not being able to carry out their scheduled landing at some distant airport. Contingency plans are most often designed to answer the question, "What do we do if things don't go according to plan?" They are responses to the "What if" questions we need to ask ourselves whenever we are putting together a plan of action for implementation.

*Step Four*, outlined above, is designed to address most *what if* kinds of questions by looking at the various consequences of implementing the proposed course of action. However, in a participatory planning process that involves new community initiatives that may not have been implemented previously, it may be useful to think about a proactive approach to contingency planning. This approach involves field tests, pilot projects and other forms of experimentation, testing and possible redesign. These interim approaches to implementation are opportunities to:

- determine whether your proposed plans and strategies are realistic and viable
- check for commitment and acceptance of the new program on the part of the recipients
- get feedback on your recommended course of action, and
- make adjustments in preparation for full implementation.

This type of testing and possible redesign will help your planning team and those responsible for implementation correct unforeseen problems before the plan becomes fully operational.

### ***Step Six: Sequencing planned events***

The final stage of action planning is sequencing the various activities or what needs to be done in what order. Planned activities are not born equal or at the same time. One tool that is helpful in avoiding scheduling glitches once the action begins is the Gantt Chart, a simple, horizontal bar chart that displays graphically the time relationships of various implementation steps. Gantt Chart components include task statements, times to start and complete each task, and their sequence relationships to each other.

Another tool to help those who will manage task relationships and actions more effectively is Critical Path Method (CPM). Essentially, this method defines what has to be done at what point in time to assure that other steps in the action chain can be done when planned. Most participatory planning practitioners start at the date the project is to be completed and work backwards through the activities and events that must occur to reach that end point. The critical path will emphasise, for example, that sub-activity Z shouldn't start before sub-activity Y has been completed. There are user-friendly computer software packages that can help organise project steps in the right sequence initially and update the critical path as new decisions are made and tasks completed.

"Critical" individuals, teams and departments responsible for implementing CPM should be involved in creating the critical path. By working out the scheduling together, they can appreciate the need to work together, collaborate and cooperate. Not unexpectedly, these participatory scheduling events often lead to improvements in the action plan. Like many of the processes we have discussed, this one has reiterative genes as well. Once implementation begins, those

involved need to revisit the critical path on a routine basis so they can respond to unseen delays and unexpected opportunities to complete certain tasks earlier than originally planned.

**Example of a Gannt or a bar chart**

Activities	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Activity 1	■	■	■	■	■	■						
Activity 2		■	■	■	■	■						
Activity 3				■	■	■	■					
Activity 4	■		■		■		■		■		■	
Activity 5		■	■	■	■							
Activity 6								■	■	■	■	■

In concluding this discussion of Planning a Course of Action Phase of the PP process, we want to highlight how important it is to increase the PP teams membership to include those who will be responsible for implementation. It is surprising how often those involved in the participatory planning process create plans that are unworkable because they believe their participation is all that is needed to reflect the input of others.

**Key points**

Planning a course of action is a six step process:

- Narrow your objective and options into a manageable few and prepare an overall strategic statement of intent.
- Run your proposed plans by key stakeholders for their final input and continuing support before being too concrete.
- Now, you can develop a concrete, detailed set of proposed implementing actions.
- Consider the potential consequences of each individual action within your plan to minimise surprises and maximise results.
- Conduct a field test or other type of proactive contingency planning if the plan is new so adjustments can be made, if necessary, before full implementation is undertaken.
- Organise your proposed actions into sequences and timeframes that are logical and realistic.



## CHAPTER 9

### PHASE VI

# IMPLEMENTING PLANS, MEASURING SUCCESS AND MOVING ON

You can't think your way out of a box; you've got to act  
**TOM PETERS**

This is the point in the participatory planning process when the baton is usually passed to those primarily responsible for implementation, but not always. Remember the many times we have advised about the ambiguity that surrounds this process? The PP team should have included from the beginning representatives of those who will be implementing the recommended actions. Other times, the actions will be implemented by coalitions of organisations represented on the planning team.

The point here is to alert you to the need to read on, regardless of your involvement status in the implementation process. While planning is planning, and implementation of those plans is, well, implementation, many of the decisions about implementation were made during the PP process. Given this curious aspect of planning, we believe it is important for members of any participatory planning team to understand some of the key points of implementation, so **read on**.

### **Pit stop**

*The action planning team has essentially completed its assigned tasks. It has taken a problem statement and worked it through a rigorous process of participatory planning. From this point on, it will be up to the implementers to follow through. However, it is possible, and increasingly likely, that those involved in participatory planning will also be involved in one or more aspects of implementation. We would argue that they most certainly should be involved in measuring the success of the venture. Before closing this discussion, let's look briefly at what happens when the action planning stage is complete.*

*The chairperson and planning team were pleased with the progress they had made in putting together an action plan with the help of key stakeholders from the neighbourhood and the city staff. Team members had been particularly sensitive to the possibility that, in their enthusiasm to complete their plan, they might commit someone to a task or responsibility without having discussed it with the individual or group. Even though they had consulted frequently with the key stakeholders including those who would be involved in implementation, the chairperson, facilitator and team members scheduled two important briefing sessions. The first was with the mayor, members of her staff, and representatives from the neighbourhood where the crisis was brewing. These representatives included individuals from both sides of the evolving controversy and key civic associations that had volunteered to assume major roles in efforts to resolve the controversy.*

*This meeting was meant to provide an opportunity for additional input from key stakeholders and to determine what role, if any, these stakeholders would like the planning team to play from this point on. They also held an open meeting with citizens from the neighbourhood even though there had been several open team work sessions in the neighbourhood during their planning efforts.*

*When that meeting was held, several neighbourhood leaders asked if the city could make the facilitator's services available to them. They expressed the need for a third party to help them resolve any differences that might arise in the implementation of the action plan. Since the mayor had informally agreed to fund up to twenty days of the facilitator's time over the next fifteen months, she was able to respond to their request immediately. She also announced at that meeting that she expected the planning team to meet with the implementing group and other key stakeholders to monitor progress and the long-term impact of the intervention at least three times over that fifteen-month period.*

### **Implementing participatory planning activities**

We raised the issue much earlier about the importance of shared leadership between local governments, civic organisations and citizens. Shared leadership, if taken beyond the planning stage, could require new ways of organising and using community resources. This in turn could mean new organisational formats to support the implementation of plans from participatory ventures. Although many manuals on the operation of mixed groups of individuals might stop here, we want to pursue the discussion longer. We think that in a world that increasingly reinvents itself to meet new needs and challenges participatory planning is a prelude to the creation of new implementation and delivery systems. That's what the remainder of the discussion will address.

Bryson and Crosby, in *Leadership for the Common Good*, remind us of the complexity often involved in implementation. "New policies, plans, programs, or projects do not implement themselves automatically..."

*implementation typically is a complex and messy process involving many actors and organisations that have a host of complementary, competing, and often contradictory goals and interests.”<sup>1</sup>*

When it comes to implementing projects and programs that have evolved from participatory planning, the process can be very complex and messy. In theory, of course, the action plan should include all details about who is expected to do what with whom, etc. But, saying it and doing it are two distinctly different realities. Let’s look at some issues that will make a positive difference in how effectively well-laid plans through participation can be implemented.

*Those who read on should realise that these are suggested steps for implementing actions, not prescriptions. Implementation will require project specific acts based on how effectively the planning team planned, and the resources available to implement them.*

## **Some ideas to ponder on the way to implementation**

### **Get the right people on board**

On several occasions, there has been talk about critical stakeholders and how, at times, the stakeholder list gets expanded or changed. We assume the planning team in our neighbourhood dispute situation recognised the importance of having those identified in the action steps also involved in the discussions and decisions. There is no easier way to lose an important implementing stakeholder than to have her learn about all the important things she is expected to do after she has been volunteered by others to do them. One important rule at this stage of the planning process is to involve representatives of those who will be responsible for implementation. At the very least, they need to be present when decisions are made about what they will be doing and how it fits into the larger implementation process. Those contracting skills we spent so much time on earlier will also come in handy in building the problem solving relationship with those who are expected to help solve the problem.

We have been assuming all along that the local government will be involved in one way or another in this participatory planning venture. This is a safe assumption even though it may have no specific active role in the implementation process. Given the importance of local government as a community institution representing all the people, it is important to think about who should be, at the very least, briefed about what will be happening as the planned intervention begins to take place.

### **Have the resources within reach**

When planning a project or program, we rarely have problems imagining the usual resources required for implementation: human resources, equipment, materials, and, of course, money. What is often more difficult are the decisions about how to organise, how to allocate and deploy resources, and in the case of many participant-planned activities, how to work effectively with volunteers.

In the action planning stage, the team was specific about time frames and responsibilities. What it may not have considered is the readiness of the resources. If, for example, the project involves volunteers, have they been brought into the process so they understand the overall project or program, what their involvement will be, and what they will be responsible for achieving as an integral part of the project or program? Do they have the knowledge and skills to do what needs to be done? If not, what will be done to provide the necessary briefings and training?

Edward De Bono, the person who brought to our minds the notion of *lateral thinking*, says those responsible for implementation need to be aware of what he calls “situational” resources. Situational resources depend on current circumstances, a change in circumstances, or a change in the *situation* itself. Situational resources accrue to the project leader who uses his or her awareness skills to identify them and to use them. They become value-added resources. For example, the project may reach a point - unanticipated, of course - where it needs a lot of unskilled people to carry out some important task. The local school has a civic club with student members who are concerned about their community and are ready to become involved. The club members have just completed a successful fund-raising campaign for a new football field in the neighbourhood. They are looking for a new project where they can make a contribution. The project leader hears about their interest and gets them involved. The project leader immediately puts the two needs together. Together, they create a situational resource.

There will be many opportunities to engage community organisations and citizens in most participatory planned events. But they won’t happen without effort and careful planning. Involving volunteers requires several preparatory actions. First they need to be identified. Some communities have rosters of potential volunteers that list their skills, the times when they are available and other useful information. Once they are contacted and agree to serve in some capacity, they need to be briefed, not just about their task responsibilities, but about the “bigger picture.” What project will they be working on? How will it contribute to the community’s quality of life? What will they be expected to do as part of the implementation team?

Often, volunteers need special training to be effective, but rarely are there opportunities to get trained. For whatever reason, we tend to believe life experience prepares us for any task that needs to be carried out in the community so long as no one has to pay for it. Volunteers will also need support from the project leader. Support may be as simple as:

- getting clarity about the time commitment expectations since volunteers are not regular employees
- knowing who they are responsible to since the person recruiting them may not be the person who provides job supervision, or
- having the supervisor write a letter of appreciation that can be used in the future by volunteers interviewing for a new job to demonstrate their civic commitment.

### **Expand the Johari window**

Remember the Johari window discussed several chapters ago? It is about sharing information among all parties in a participatory effort to shrink the *blind spots* and *hidden agendas* that may exist in the relationship, particularly between local government and citizens. Implementing projects that cut across organisational boundaries may involve individuals who may not have worked together in the past or who come to the project with varying expectations about their own roles and contributions. Under these conditions, involved individuals can be burdened with misunderstandings, mixed messages and miscommunication. Everyone in the project needs to take responsibility for expanding the open window of communication, overcoming blind spots and making public any hidden agendas.

### **Organise around needs – not tradition**

More and more local governments are recognising the need to operate at the neighbourhood level. While writing this part of the manual, there was a call from an old friend who talked about two smaller cities with which he has been working that have put added emphasis on working with neighbourhoods. One has a neighbourhood resource office located in the neighbourhood; another has a department for neighbourhood development directed by a person they refer to as the *neighbourhood vitality manager*. More and more cities are decentralising their work force and giving employees responsibility for working directly with citizens to increase the quality of life within a specific neighbourhood.

Other variations on how to organise for the implementation of a project or program that has emerged from a participatory planning process include:

- creating a temporary organisation which either dies from success or transforms itself into another life-form, and
- contracting the program or service delivery to a community-based organisation.

In our mythical case study of the neighbourhood in distress, there were options considered to minimise the direct involvement of the mayor's office while at the same time lending its prestige to help local citizens achieve intended results.

### **Stick a toe in the water**

There are times when the participatory planning process is used to bring about innovation in local governments or to set up an experiment that runs counter to conventional wisdom - "This is the way things have always been done around here." If these or similar motivations are behind the use of participatory planning ventures, it may make sense to have a test run of the new ideas before they are adopted wholesale for use city or region wide.

There are a number of options for "sticking one's toe in the water" before diving in too deeply. Two seem particularly appropriate as ways of staging participatory planning recommendations that may carry an element of doubt or risk if implemented fully.

1. The first involves a more conservative approach to assure the changes being recommended through the participatory planning process will achieve their objectives and produce the intended results. It involves testing and possible redesign of the option before implementing it throughout the community. Suppose the participatory planning team had been asked to make recommendations on establishing neighbourhood police units that report to a neighbourhood advisory committee. The planning team might want to recommend that the idea be tested and evaluated in one neighbourhood before the city council adopts the program citywide. Testing and redesign is an opportunity to try out the new approaches and strategies in a relatively safe environment.
2. The second is experimentation, a bolder approach to bringing about planned change within a community. For example, a small group of citizens decide to establish an alternative learning centre in the neighbourhood for

street children who have dropped out of school. The citizens believe a centre, equipped with computers and self-learning packages and equally important, serving breakfast to those who successfully complete agreed-upon lesson plans, could motivate those children who have already demonstrated life survival skills. The intent is to motivate them to take charge of their own formal education albeit in an unconventional fashion. The citizens need the city's department of education to legitimise the program, contributions from the business community to equip the centre, and ownership of the idea from enough street children to make it a viable experiment. To plan their course of action, this small group of visionary citizens has pulled together a team of stakeholders, including representatives from those interests just mentioned, who will participate in a decision making process to turn this vision into reality.

### **Keep the planners involved**

Sometimes the participatory planning process ends when recommendations are handed over to the mayor or some other major community player. This person in turn passes the plan on to an implementing agency that, hopefully, goes about implementing it. As a result, those who were involved in the participatory planning process as well as other stakeholders retire from their temporary service as helpers. In many cases, these are appropriate actions. Citizen participation can be overdone. Some local governments with a deep commitment to involving citizens in the past have tempered their enthusiasm in recent years for many reasons. The management of participation can be time-consuming, and it often takes responsibility away from those public officials who have the authority to act for the community, i.e., local elected officials.

Let's look at some ways the participatory planning process can perform an active and productive role during implementation. First, some of those involved might become an informal advisory committee to those responsible for implementation. This is particularly helpful if the implementing team comes from different sectors of the community.

Secondly, there may be a facilitation role that could be performed by one or more from the planning team. For example, because they are familiar with the project, these team members could provide support and encouragement or help individuals who may represent different perspectives or vested interests to work more effectively together. The group process and problem-solving skills the planning team has learned from the facilitator, hopefully, will be passed on to others as the community builds its capacity to resolve more and more issues and concerns using its own resources.

Another logical role for the planning team during implementation is to provide monitoring and evaluation services. Is the project or program on track? Is it achieving its intended results? Can the impact it is having on the local government and community be sustained? But, we are rapidly getting into the next step.

### **Measure and share success**

There are a few key bottom line issues on the participatory planning ledger of accounts.

1. Did the participatory planning process improve the overall governance of the community, e.g., more openness, increased accountability, and greater involvement of citizens in decision making and problem solving?
2. Will the involvement of citizens through participatory planning result in positive, measurable and sustainable improvements for the community?
3. Has the process added to the social capital of the community?

If the answers to the first two questions are problematic in any way, then the participatory planning process has not lived up to its expectations. The answer to the third question will, necessarily, be relegated to the philosophers and political theoreticians. Nevertheless, it is a question worth asking over and over as we strive to build a sustainable civil society.

Measuring success achieved in the first instance, improved governance, is obviously more attainable than quantifying the increase in social capital. Nevertheless, it is still difficult by most standards. Determining the impact of programs and services delivered as a result of the participatory planning process will be an easier task. What we have to say about evaluating at this level of reality should be helpful in addressing the other two.

First, it is important to realise that how well you assess the impact of any program or service will depend on how well you have defined the problem or opportunity and have written your goal and objective statements at the beginning of this long planning process. If you haven't been clear and concise about these details, then determining the impact will be nearly impossible. So, the task of impact evaluation begins with the first "hello" and needs to be part of the expectations of both the facilitator and the client.

Second, the assessment of outcomes from projects and programs, another way to say *impact evaluation*, also depends on the planning team's efforts to monitor the planning process leading up to the proposed intervention. Throughout the team's efforts, the following are some of the questions that need to be asked:

- Will this planned activity achieve the objectives we established earlier?
- Will we be able to determine at some future time whether the program or service being planned has had the desired impact or results?
- Has the definition of the problem or opportunity changed as a result of our planning efforts? If so, do we need to change our objectives and the outcomes they are expected to achieve?
- Have we had enough contact with the client to be assured of their commitment to achieving the intended results?

### **Criteria for assessing impact**

Let's look at criteria, and accompanying questions to ask in carrying out an impact assessment within the implementing organisation(s) and the community on which the service or program is intended to have impact. Some of these inquiries are concerned with whether the program or service was implemented as planned, i.e., did the implementing agency carry out the plan as intended? Others are more concerned with evaluating the outcome or impact of the implemented service or program.

Planning teams and those responsible for implementation often confuse the terms, *outputs* and *outcomes*. Outputs are measurable indicators of progress toward the achievement of objectives. Outcomes are the planned and sometimes unplanned results of the intervention. Here are some indicators to serve as a basis for measurement.

#### ***Adequacy:***

- Was the action plan sufficient to accomplish the objectives?
- Were the objectives adequate to solve the problem or take advantage of the opportunity?
- Were the resources available sufficient to carry out the action plan?
- Can the results be sustained?

#### ***Effectiveness:***

- Was the action plan implemented?
- Were the goals and objectives achieved as planned?

#### ***Efficiency:***

- Could the resources have been used differently or substituted to have produced more results within estimated costs or the same results more inexpensively?
- How costly was the action plan when compared to resulting benefits?
- Would an alternative plan have produced the same results at a lower cost?
- Were resources managed in the most efficient way possible to achieve the objectives?

#### ***Consequences:***

- Have the outcomes envisioned by the planned effort been achieved? This is a slightly different inquiry from the one regarding objectives.
- What have been the overall benefits to the recipients of the planned effort?
- What liabilities have been incurred by the implemented effort?
- What unanticipated consequences have there been as a result of the planned actions?
- If sustainability was a criterion of success, will it be realised?

Evaluation should be an on-going process during the planning stage of interventions and more than just an evaluation of progress toward fulfilment of the tasks assigned. It should include an assessment of how well the team is functioning. Evaluation is also the time when we look back to see if we did what we said we were going to do and determining how well we did it. The evaluation of impact that any program or service is having in the community or on the lives of citizens may have to wait until long after the plan of action has been completed. Given the importance of these types of long-range inquiries, participatory planners also need to be anticipatory. Otherwise, the accumulation of social capital resulting from their actions may never be known. It's all about legacy.

### **Reflection time**

We have outlined several key points to consider in implementing plans. Go back and review them briefly, thinking about your own experience in this stage of decision making and problem solving. Which of these points seemed most problematic at the time? What could have been done differently?

### **Moving on**

This concludes the journey for those who are or want to be engaged in participatory planning at the local level of governance and community involvement. The goal has been to provide a learning opportunity about how to implement a participatory planning process from either a strategic-or action-oriented perspective. The intended audience for these materials spans civic organisations like non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations, individual citizens, and local governments without favouritism. In other words, we believe the application of these concepts and strategies can be initiated from any corner of the community.

As a final note, we want to comment one more time about the importance of both strategic and action planning as tools for building local government and community capacity to engage in sustainable development. While the focus of strategic planning is more long term and global, and action planning more immediate and targeted, the stages and steps we have outlined are germane to both. Both processes, to be effective, would include the following activities:

- Vigilant attention to community problems and opportunities, and the honing of awareness and visionary skills by all public officials and citizens.
- The use of one or more outside facilitators who have a commitment to train others in the community to facilitate future participatory planning endeavours. This is known as capacity building or more crassly as “working yourself out of future business.”
- The process of principled contracting between public officials and citizens, facilitators and clients, and all others who engage in participatory planning. This is also known as *building productive partnerships*.
- Stakeholder analysis at different stages of the planning process as the need for greater involvement and collaboration is discovered and rediscovered.
- Rigorous data gathering and analysis although the focus and scale of these tasks will differ depending on whether the intent of the planning is strategic or tactical.
- Planning courses of action while realising the amount of detail required and the time perspectives will differ based on whether the planning is strategic or more immediate action planning.
- Attention to issues of impact and consequences, e.g., strategic planners taking a long term, over-the-horizon perspective while the action planning team would be assessing the potential of short and intermediate-term impact and consequences.
- Vigorous, consistent, inclusive and in-depth citizen and civic leadership involvement coupled with local government commitment and resources.
- Elements of individual joy, excitement, hard work, frustration and accomplishment in working together to contribute to the community's quality of life for those who are and those who will be.

### **Key points**

- The success of implementation is greatly enhanced by:
  - Getting the right people on board.
  - Having the resources within reach.
  - Expanding the Johari Window of communication.
  - Organising around needs, not tradition.
  - Sticking your toe into the water before diving in.
  - Keeping the planners involved.
  - Measuring and sharing successes.
  
- Criteria for assessing the impact of participatory planned implementations include *adequacy, effectiveness, efficiency and consequences*.
  
- The concepts and strategies for participatory planning can be initiated from any corner of the community.

Go forth, participate and plan worthy projects and good deeds
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### **Endnotes**

1 Bryson, John M. and Barbara Crosby. “**Leadership for the Common Good**”. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1992, p. 281.