Introduction to Transformational Strategy Book.

Introduction

A large ICA network developed the planning methods in Laura Spencer’s *Winning through Participation: Meeting the Challenge of Corporate Change With the Technology of Participation.* Laura spoke directly to the corporate world when she and her colleagues coined the term “ToP Technology of Participation®” to bring a unifying perspective to those values and approaches that:

• bring together a wide range of perspectives, resulting in a comprehensive strategic plan;

• accomplish in a short time what would have taken weeks or even months using traditional planning methods;

• produce action plans that get done;

• generate commitment and team spirit, resulting in quick, effective implementation, and

• follow up with strategic reviews that keep plans on track as circumstances change.

She showed how ToP processes and methods enabled companies to be much more effective in what we might call the productivity paradigm, with examples from McDonald’s Corporation, Hughes Tool Company, Sun Chemical, Nichii Department Store, and others in the private sector.

Today, however, a sea change has swept over our world, Society is becoming more interested in participatory management and facilitative leadership, and participation means much more than productivity and accomplishments. The bar is higher for participation, communication, ethical behavior, stakeholder relations, organizational culture, and social responsibility, than ever before. The internet and global media have taken us for a quantum leap in connectivity. The globaliza- tion of everything from markets to community-based development has wired us all more closely together and we are far more aware and attuned to what is happening than we ever were. We’re a knowledge-based society rather than a world based on production. Ideas are the currency of the day. Crises and large-scale collapses in finance, international relations, or failed states are requiring us to come up with new ways of being together in this interdependent world.

Also, since that time, at least 100,000 people have taken ToP courses and there are master ToP practitioners and trainers in 30 countries. using ToP methods, the Asian Development Bank accelerated micronutrient food fortification in seven countries; the City of Toronto unanimously

passed a unique five-pillar policy on drug use; the Inuvik Hospital quickly moved from one site to another within a few days, with no disruption to patient care; Great Eastern Life Assurance Co. Ltd. won an award for people-oriented management; the cities of Cedar Rapids and New Orleans planned for flood recovery and rebuilding; the 100 Valleys Project in Peru reversed the decline of agricultural production; the African Foundation for Development in London devel- oped new and sustainable partners; the Il Ngwesi Maasai community in Kenya tested 90% of its population for HIV/AIDS.

This is a small sample from hundreds of stories reported by ToP practitioners. Equally important, those organizations experienced benefits beyond the realization of goals. Employees became directly involved in planning and problem solving tasks. They took new roles, animating and inspiring project teams and departments. These organizations retained employees by involving them in serious initiatives to improve everything from policy to operations. The surge of commit- ment created by using ToP methods ignites the energy, enthusiasm, and creativity essential to any organization’s success and sustainability in today’s complex environment.

ICA created ToP methods to provide leaders and facilitators with approaches adaptable to the unique specifics of any situation. Many deeply divided groups in society have experienced recon- ciliation, as sophisticated ToP methods enabled them to focus on common visions of the future, rather than fractional differences. ToP practitioners have worked with united Nations organiza- tions, civil society organizations, scores of national and state governments, hundreds of corpora- tions and companies, and innumerable regional authorities and non-profit associations.

Our intensified awareness and closeness is extending our sense of empathy beyond all known boundaries. With the world in our living room, we cannot avoid forming closer bonds, seek- ing new solutions, and calling for new levels of ethical behavior and transparency. People want deeper and more meaningful engagement. We are beckoned to step beyond functional, production-oriented ways of thinking, organizing, and acting—to move into deeper and more meaningful engagement which integrates new value sets and operating modes. Beyond mere progressive change, we are all together rewriting the book on how to be human, how to be an organization, and how to make the transformation.

The world used to cry out for participative management that linked values to a management style of the future. Now, however, the world needs facilitative leadership—the ability to lead social, organizational, and corporate transformation in a way that engages everybody in it together. ToP methods go far beyond the old productivity paradigm, and actually help organiza- tions make this leap. In the 80s, few books explained how to translate participative management from theory into reality. So *Winning through Participation* was written to bridge that gap. Today,

as facilitative leadership is taking root in organizations around the world, *Transformational Strategy: Facilitation of ToP Participatory Planning* shows substantial ways to put that concept into practice.

**Transformational energy**

From their earliest efforts, practitioners of ToP methods discovered they were getting much more than just solid plans and positive results. Something was happening to the people in the organi- zations. There was a sparkle in the eye, a lightness in the step, and a degree of commitment that was delightfully new and seemed almost magical. People in the organization would notice a real difference, but be at a loss to explain what it was. Clearly some kind of transformational energy was at work. What is the transformational capacity of ToP methods? ToP practitioners may answer that question in their own unique way, but here is what I have seen.

It happens first at a very personal level. Participants say their voices are heard and their ideas treated with respect. They understand how their practical decisions affect the direction of the organization or community. They know how to have a positive effect on their own future. They have deeper respect for others in the organization. They understand their situation better, because they have integrated the perspectives of others with their own. They talk about assum- ing greater responsibility for the whole organization, because they have participated in deter- mining what is necessary. They want to expand their personal capacities in ways they have not used before.

Second, they see a change in other people. They notice people listening more carefully, being less fearful of new situations, and building up the confidence that comes with accomplishing goals as a team. They notice colleagues trying out creative, innovative solutions to previously insoluble problems. They recognize that the group as a whole is demonstrating values, exhibiting behaviors, and generating results. Everyone is taking more interest in their work.

Third, they talk about the positive impact that the organization is having on its intended stake- holders or on society. They mention how the organization has a new story about its role, and how that story is being acted upon. They refer to a new courage in the organization’s ability to act, and how this courage is not simply vested in the leadership at the top, but is imbedded throughout the organization. It seems that the old riddle of “What comes first … personal trans- formation? Or social transformation?” has been solved. They occur simultaneously, with a feed- back loop one to the other.

**Strategic thinking**

This book is about strategic thinking. But as Henry Mintzberg, McGill university professor of Management Studies, says, “Strategic planning is not strategic thinking.” Mintzberg draws a dis- tinction between strategic planning (or the systematic programming of pre-identified strategies), and strategic thinking which seeks innovation and imagines new futures that lead to the forma- tion of core strategies.

Strategic thinking is concretely grounded in reality, and deals with the real specifics of the situation. It is not a detached analysis, but works from deep within the actual workings of an organization and its world. It is indicative in that it deals with the way things are, rather than assumptions about the way things ought to be in a perfect universe. It is practical, aimed at real results, and at making a substantial impact.

The facilitation of participative strategic thinking is complex because it requires cooperation in creating and guiding a journey of innovation. Participative strategic thinking is focused on determining intentions. It is positive in that the whole thinking process is oriented toward mak- ing good things happen. It ensures that both creative and critical thinking are incorporated into strategy. It is intuitive and imaginative.

Strategies of transformation involve dealing with contradiction. ICA has brought a unique gift to the practice of strategy development and of transformation through its understanding of con- tradiction. No one else comes close to ICA’s ability to ground that concept in philosophy, psycho- logy, change theory, and planning methodology—so that transformation, not productivity, is the result of strategy. ToP participatory strategic planning offers that unique gift which has benefit- ted organizations and communities the world over.

It will take the entire book to explain, illustrate, and illuminate the power that contradiction gives to strategies of transformation. Contradiction is derived from a synthesis between a posi- tive image of an intended future (which is one’s mission, purpose, values and vision), and an anal- ysis of the real and complex current situation that one finds oneself in. It requires real courage to stare into the hard cold reality of the present situation while figuring out how to bring about a new future. The ToP orientation keeps the big picture in mind. It takes a whole systems perspec- tive, and draws meaning from the complex relationships.

***Part A, Transformation by Participation***, illustrates how the Technology of Participation has guided large and small-scale transformation in adapting to a wide variety of situations. Brief stor- ies show how the methods have helped resolve problems associated with the diversification of

populations, responding to natural disasters, building ecological and sustainability movements, forming communities of interest and practice, or enhancing the quality of life and social change in general. Examples are included of specific organizations, communities, and companies. This section also includes a history of the development of the ToP approach, and its foundations in philosophy and the social sciences.

***Part B, Transparent Method***, illuminates the mental models, theory, methods, and tools that make ToP participatory planning so dynamic and powerful. It also shows the framework of par- ticipation that envelops the ToP participatory strategic planning process, and how it guides a transformation from its early stages through the entire process.

***Part C, Participatory Strategy: The Spiral Process***, goes deeply into the theory, practice, and appli- cation of the key parts of ToP participatory strategic planning that have occasioned transforma- tion in communities, organizations, businesses and governments over the past three decades. This section includes specific examples and expanded procedures for those who have taken the ToP Participatory strategic planning course, and who need additional help in their specific situation.

***Part D, Enhanced Methods and Tools***, demonstrates the variations that add a higher level of intention to transformation, and therefore make it more seamless. This section also includes documentation of live examples of participatory strategic planning processes, and detailed pro- cedures for some of the tools mentioned earlier in the book.

**ToP practitioner’s dilemma**

Dependent on fundraising to fund their charitable activities, many of the 34 ICA offices around the world found a new source of self-support by marketing to many types of clients the planning methods they had developed. Their clients included dozens of civil society and united Nations organizations, scores of national and state governments, hundreds of corporations and com- panies, and innumerable regional authorities and non-profit associations. Leaders of all these groups wanted solid, measurable results from their investment. ToP methods demonstrated again and again that they delivered results.

By the mid 1990s there were over a thousand ToP practitioners around the world, many of whom would call themselves part- or full-time facilitators. At the time, the landscape was beginning to shift. Founders of the newly forming profession were beginning to consider the very nature of facilitation, and one of its most basic tenets was that of neutrality. As facilitators, ToP practition- ers knew they could always play a neutral role with participants, but as agents of transformation there was still the question of whether they could really be neutral.

Professional facilitators debate this possibility of being a neutral presence and at the same time being a conscious agent of transformation. A transformational process used by an agent is heav- ily dependent on the values and philosophy of that agent, but those values and philosophy may not be shared by the client group and participants. Does one knowingly use a transformational process that shifts the client or participants in the direction of one’s own values, or does one try to remain neutral knowing that the client’s values may be the main dysfunction within the group?

This tension exposes the central dilemma of the ToP practitioner. On-the-ground evidence from

35 years of practice by hundreds of master ToP practitioners shows that the methods are indeed transformational—as they were designed to be. Therefore, the ToP practitioner can remain simply a professional facilitator, and use the methods as neutral planning and productivity tools—just as many clients want. On the other hand, the facilitator can admit to a transforma- tional intent, use the methods at their full power … and take the consequences. Typically, the consequence is that the client is happier afterwards. However, if you talk about the potential for transformation beforehand, it can cause a degree of nervousness in clients. As more and more ToP practitioners and certified facilitators become passionate enough about the potential for positive change in society they talk about it with the client in advance. When they don’t mention it, they are in a similar position to a master architect who doesn’t mention his or her qualifica- tions when renovating a neighbor’s garage. Selecting a master ToP practitioner to create a plan to increase productivity is somewhat akin to selecting a Ferrari to drive to the convenience store for milk. A reasonable question for every ToP practitioner is “When do I want to facilitate what the client wants, and when do I want to help them transform their situation?”

Consequently, while this book is primarily about the transformational aspects of ToP methods and how contradictions are at the core of the transformation, it can also be used by facilitators who want to know how to guide and facilitate the participatory development of an effective strategic plan.

‑ Bill Staples