



Course Learning Outcomes for Unit II

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Employ communication techniques for effective strategic planning.

Reading Assignment

In order to access the following resource(s), click the link(s) below:

Alexander, S. (2014). The new world reality of benefits communication. *Employee Benefit Review*, 68(11), 13-14. Retrieved from <https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1527318778?accountid=33337>

Alexander, S. (2015). The secret weapon of modern benefits: A strategic plan. *Employee Benefit Review*, 69(9), 12-13. Retrieved from <https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1658883157?accountid=33337>

Vanderberg, A., & Capodagli, B. (2015). The "Ottawa way" thrives. *Public Management*, 97(6), 14-18. Retrieved from <https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/docview/1702634016?accountid=33337>

Bernstal, J. B. (2004). Here's the plan. *ABA Bank Marketing*, 36(7), 18-22. Retrieved from <https://libraryresources.columbiasouthern.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=14402320&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Click [here](#) to view the Unit II Presentation.

Click [here](#) to view the Unit II Presentation transcript.

Unit Lesson

Introduction

As Sheri Alexander (2015) discusses in "The Secret Weapon of Modern Benefits: A Strategic Plan," organizations that use strategic planning tend to deal with it in two ways. Some organizations schedule meetings and create a report that is rarely referenced in day-to-day operations. The work is formulaic and only completed because it is something that organizations are expected to do. Other organizations take the opposite approach and use the strategic plan as a crucial element in the day-to-day decision-making process; it is important in the stability and sustainability of the company and helps to set priorities and goals.

What is the key difference between these types of organizational outlooks? Why will one company embrace strategic planning while another ignores the process or treats it as a yearly obligation that offers little to no benefit for an organization?

First, it is important to understand the concept of a strategic plan. Such notables as Vince Lombardi, former coach of the Green Bay Packers, and Margaret Thatcher, who was the longest serving Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, have stated a variation of the adage "plan your work, and work your plan." This phrase is an effective nutshell statement as it includes two of the three fundamental aspects of strategy—planning and execution. It does not include the third fundamental aspect of communication, but it is still a good place to

start.

The plan itself is a document that is used to communicate the organizational goals and the actions needed to achieve these goals. There are many different frameworks and methodologies for creating a strategic plan. While there are no absolute rules, most strategic plans follow a similar pattern and have common attributes.

Plan Your Work

1. Analysis or Assessment:

Alexander (2015) suggests beginning with a review of past and current organizational values, including any mission statements. It is important to understand how the company arrived to its current position and how the current system is functioning. Management needs to make choices about what the organization wants to achieve and how to best achieve those goals. In "Here's the Plan," Mary Baker describes a four-step process to bring a troubled organization back into focus (as cited in Bernstal, 2004). The first step is collecting and analyzing external and internal data. Look into customer satisfaction. Gather numbers, check trends, and also review employee satisfaction (Bernstal, 2004). Know where the organization currently stands and where leaders want to take it.

2. Strategy Formulation

In this stage, it can be helpful to create a clear organizational mission statement. Cover the key steps that need to be taken that are critical to achieve the required changes. Alexander (2015) recommends creating a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). Work from a blank slate, Alexander (2015) advocates, which will give a team the ability to consider all possibilities and ideas. Determine the priorities for the organization in this phase. Evaluate how to focus on the strengths of the organization.

A common criticism of the SWOT analysis technique is that organizations can use the technique to justify remaining in the same place rather than changing and growing. However, this is not an issue of the strategy tool itself, but rather, this is an issue of how an organization applies the tool. If the focus is on aspirations and moving forward, the SWOT analysis will be helpful in achieving these goals. A key element is to have specific indicators of success—actionable objectives with specific end points.

Neil Gaiman, who is a famous author of both adult and children's books, discusses the benefit of focusing on aspirations and moving forward in his 2012 commencement address to the University of the Arts. He visualized his goal of being a writer as a distant mountain that he would continuously walk toward. Gaiman (2012) explained to the graduating class that as long as he kept walking toward the mountain, he knew he was on the right path. He evaluated every job opportunity on the basis of whether it took him closer to his goals or pulled him further away. Even if the jobs were attractive and paid a great deal of money, the first evaluation had to be if they brought him closer to the metaphorical mountain.

Although Gaiman speaks about his individual goals, this system works just as well for an organization. Bernstal (2004) encourages the same type of a system: Make assumptions from the data, and then ask how to get the organization from its current state to the new goal. Use the SWOT analysis to focus on the most important areas for change and the desired results.

Work Your Plan

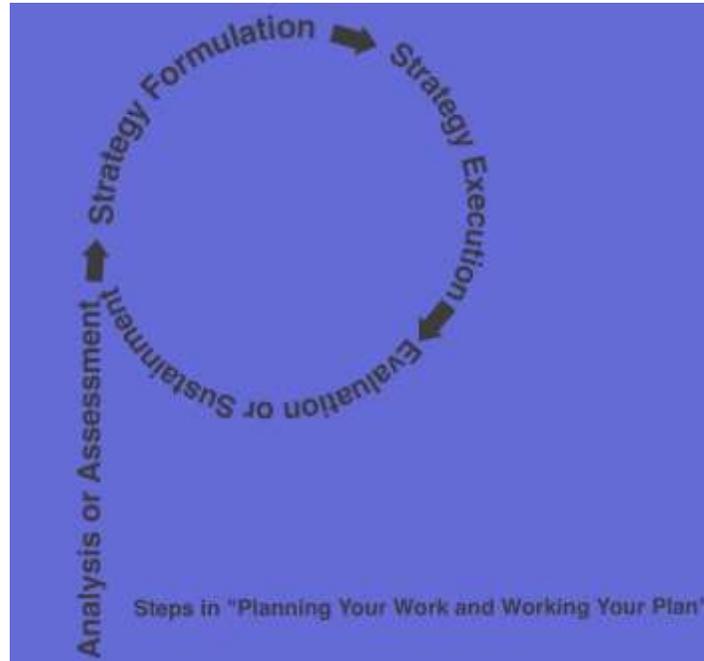
3. Strategy Execution

Executing a strategy represents a disciplined process or a logical set of connected activities that enables an organization to make it work. When the strategy is complete, recognize the fact that the document is not set in stone; it can be adjusted.

4. Evaluation or Sustainment

Results of the implementation process need to be evaluated: This is a continuous process. As Alexander (2015) explains, no one can anticipate every situation, but an organization can be proactive and make decisions that react to changing conditions. If the company is missing the target, Baker explains, employees

first need to find out what has caused the diversion and then decide what they need to do about the situation (as cited in Bernstal, 2004).



Steps for planning your work

Employee Engagement—The Key Difference

Employee participation is vital when an organization decides to embark on a program of change. Whatever aspect provides the eventual impetus, one aspect is clear; the old way is not working, and a new framework of operation is needed. When that happens, companies need to include employees in the process; this is a key part of communicating with people during a change. Employees who understand the strategy will be able to make day-to-day decisions that support it.

5. Develop a Strategy for Communication

How information is presented to employees—the channel that is used for communication—is an essential step in the process. Alexander (2014) explains that it is important to use the right channel for communication and to focus messages on actionable information, as listed below:

- *Corporate Intranet*: Note that many organizational intranets are stale and out of date. You will have better luck if this is cared for, updated, and kept relevant to be a successful employee communication tool.
- *Mobile*: The rise of mobile is the most recent significant change in communications. There are now very few barriers to staying connected in or out of the office.
- *Social Media*: This has changed the way businesses communicate with their customers, but it has done little to change the way people within the business communicate with each other. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, and YouTube are primarily business-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer networks. They offer immense customer reach, but they are not great places to have meaningful conversations with employees and their families.
- *E-mail*: Love it or hate it, e-mail forms a major part of most workers' communication. It is increasingly difficult to separate signal from noise, and it lacks accountability. "Read receipts" are notoriously unreliable, and you often do not know if the recipient is going to do what you requested, or whether he or she even received the message (pp. 13-14).

Each type of channel has both positive and negative aspects. Depending on the audience, the purpose of the communication, and the situation, one channel may be better than another. A corporate intranet has the advantage of privacy. It is generally only accessible to those within the company. Management can control which employees have access to areas within the intranet, and, with the addition of cloud computing, it can

often be accessed from anywhere. This brings in the advantage of a mobile channel, as well, and is ideal if a company wants a more flexible workforce. On the negative side, a corporate intranet is an additional expense and may not be feasible for all organizations.

Social media accounts have the advantage of being relatively inexpensive. Many of the accounts are free to create. However, these accounts are often less secure, lack privacy, and, as Alexander (2014) notes, may not be the best platform to develop meaningful conversations between employees. E-mail can also be relatively private and secure, but response time is an issue in many organizations.

6. Create a Process for Feedback

The Unit I Lesson stated that the desired outcome of any communication process is to have the receiver (or receivers) understand the message. Creating a system of feedback for employees to address concerns and make suggestions about the strategic plan is a good way to check if the “receivers” understood the message. Whatever channel is employed, an organization must be prepared to work with employees and provide guidance until they become familiar with their new responsibilities and the changes in the culture of the organization.

Many organizations also request feedback from their clients/customers and use this to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategic plan. It is a way to check if the goals are being met for customer satisfaction and, in the case of continuing evaluation, it indicates the areas where the organization should concentrate its efforts.

References

- Alexander, S. (2014). The new world reality of benefits communication. *Employee Benefit Review*, 68(11), 13-14.
- Alexander, S. (2015). The secret weapon of modern benefits: A strategic plan. *Employee Benefit Review*, 69(9). 12-13.
- Bernstal, J. B. (2004). Here’s the plan. *ABA Bank Marketing*, 36(7), 18-22.
- Gaiman, N. (2012). Keynote address 2012: 134th commencement. Retrieved from <http://www.uarts.edu/neil-gaiman-keynote-address-2012>

Suggested Reading

The article below highlights some of the issues discussed in the Unit II Lesson.

- Gaiman, N. (2012). Keynote address 2012: 134th commencement. Retrieved from <http://www.uarts.edu/neil-gaiman-keynote-address-2012>

Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

Apply What You Have Learned

Consider what type of communication channels are used in the place where you currently work or in a place where you were formerly employed. What channels did you find to be effective? What channels did not work as well?

Non-graded Learning Activities are provided to aid students in their course of study. You do not have to submit them. If you have questions, contact your instructor for further guidance and information.