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ABSTRACT
        Ways in which community "visioning" can be used to
generate support and action for community education are described in
this paper. Six steps in the community visioning process are
discussed: (1) preparing; (2) conducting a workshop; (3) obtaining
community feedback; (4) action planning; (5) recruiting,
implementing, and following up; and (6) evaluating and celebrating.
The community visioning model presents an alternative to the
traditional needs-based or deficit-planning process in the following
ways: it is proactive, future-oriented; and it views the community
educator as a facilitator. Two figures are included. (Contains 21
references.) (LMI)

COMMUNITY VISIONING:
GENERATING SUPPORT AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Timothy J. Ellis, M.Div., Peter J. Murk, Ph.D. & Gordon Ipson, M.S.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationships between community education, community development, and businesses have been rather close for a long time. There has been much discussion lately in community and economic development and businesses about a process called "visioning." Promoters of visioning say that it is not just a new term for strategic planning, nor is it a transcendental, right-brained "happening," high on imagination but low on reality. Rather, they hold, it is a fundamental paradigm shift in our customary planning practices made necessary by the changes in our wc..1d, and at the rate and nature of change itself.

Using these discussions of visioning as a resource base, this presentation examines the question, "How might community visioning be done fruitfully in the context of community education?" Within the limits of this paper, it would be impossible to discuss the many variations and alternative visioning models found in the literature. What we have chosen to do instead, is to offer an interpretation and synthesis. A resource reference list is included if you wish to explore other approaches and perspectives.

DEFINITIONS

While definitions vary, sometimes heatedly, we offer that visioning is a long-range planning process which emphasizes shared hopes, purposes, goals, resources, and commitments. By beginning with a shared vision for the future rather than the standard needs assessment of the present, planners hope to minimize or circumvent the usual problems of becoming bogged down with community grievances and immediate felt needs before planning can ever take place (Wade, 1989; McKnight, 1985).

From a business organizational viewpoint, vision is defined as "a description of what the organization will look like when it is fulfilling its purpose" (Pascarella & Frohman, 1989, p. 23). Thus, when we do the community visioning process, vision describes what the community will look like when it is fulfilling its shared purpose.

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ASSUMPTIONS

One of the first questions to arise, when facing the task of developing a shared community vision is: WHOSE VISION will be accepted as the "shared vision" toward which the community is encouraged to cooperatively move? Suppose we say that the shared community vision should come from all the members of the community, or from representative leaders of all the elements in the community. We then must confront the logistics of such a democratic and participatory ideal. Most of us know how difficult it is to get a major task accomplished by a committee of 20. But what are the chances of getting something actually done, by a scattered committee of say, 46,000 people?

In debates by community leaders, grass-roots origination and participation is lauded, not only for idealistic reasons, but the for the need for community members to "own" their shared vision if they are to commit themselves to its fulfillment (Sandmann & Granger, 1991). But those who are familiar with efforts to get 46,000 people to make or do anything together often suggests that input comes in a different form than the claims that "We'll all make or do this together" (Sandmann, 1991).

One way that 46,000 people can, if they would, is to each contribute to a community vision, and to give feedback and ideas concerning one or more models that have been put together by a considerably smaller group of people. Perhaps it is more pragmatic than elitist to suggest that this smaller committee consists of people who are most familiar with both planning processes and the community -- in other words, the sharpest of the "movers and shakers" in a community.

Because large groups tend to experience a "diffusion of accountability," it is probably also psychologically accurate to say that a smaller group will take on the visioning task with more sense of personal responsibility. Generally speaking, the more people involved in doing a task together, the less responsibility for the outcomes each group member has contributed.

The tentative planning model we've put together attempts to foster grass-roots input and ownership along with the formulation of the vision being done by a few good community leaders. We might add that the attempts to "involve everyone" are not cosmetic nor are they hypocritical attempts to make "the little guys feel attended to, while the out-of-touch big guys make the decisions". The community members not in selected leadership positions are actively involved at nearly every stage, and can alter or eliminate what the leaders create. Their power is real, posited, and acknowledged.

THE VISIONING / ACTION PLANNING PROCESS

The community visioning process has six steps or phases: 1) Pre-kickoff (preparation phase) , 2) Kick-off (visioning workshop), 3) Obtaining community feedback, 4) Action planning, 5) Recruitment, implementation, long-term follow-up, and 6) Evaluation and celebration phase. Please refer to FIGURE 2 on page 9 for an illustration of the community visioning process model.

1.   STEP ONE - PRE-KICKOFF -- PREPARATION.

The first task of this phase is to gather preliminary data from community members and any other reliable source. Data is gathered concerning:

- What the community is like.

- What community members would like the community to be like in 15 years.

- What changes researchers and thought leaders predict during the next 15 years in the world, country state, and in the community.

- What plans have been tried in the community in the past, how they apparently worked out, and reasons why this information either is or isn't applicable now.

- What external factors supply constraints, support, or opportunities to the community, and possibilities for modifying or responding to these.

- Community resources, strengths, or capacities.

- Information about felt needs is not necessarily requested, but is welcomed and included.

To save on expenses, it is suggested that people in the community do the data gathering as volunteers rather than hiring outside professional consultants. This approach is cost saving and contributes to making the process a "community wide" endeavor. The exception would be when particular information may require expertise not available within the community itself. The community can also save money if the data-gathers rely on accepted compilations of information which predict future trends, rather than doing their own research from primary sources. For example, books such as Megatrends 2000 and other common futuristic library references may be very helpful.

Next, the community educator(s) need(s) to gather input from the community itself, which will be used by community leaders to generate a

"shared community vision." This task may not be difficult in a small rural community of 460 persons; but how does one persuade 46,000 people to give preliminary input? This is one of the few times during where we suggest that money be spent. It may be an effective use of resources to sponsor a community-wide (visioning) contest. Prizes can be awarded for essays on one of two topics:

- How I (best) describe my community, and

- What I want my community to be like in 15 years.

Prizes might be awarded for the best school essays in grades 5 and 6. and so on through grade 12: and then ten prizes awarded to adults (depending upon the population). Involving the schools would thus make free school and newspaper publicity. and thousands and teachers and parents will become instant explainers and promoters. and potential participants in the process.

After the contest. prizes and honorable mentions are distributed and publicized. Compilations are then prepared which include: the best essays, summarizations of ideas. and relevant descriptions of data gathered from other sources.

These compilation of "books" are needed most of all for informing the community leaders who will be invited to the visioning session. in order that the most effective use can be made of people's time. These leaders will have both information and inspiration on which to begin their visioning before they ever get to the "visioning" meeting. Chances are, they will discuss ideas with others before the big "kickoff" formal meeting. The compilations are also sent to prize winners and other strategic persons. and are made available at cost to anyone wishing to purchase one.

For ongoing reference purposes. the information is also used to create a local computer database   It is suggested that the data to be divided into external data sources (opportunities. perceived threats. barriers. trends. and resources outside the community). and internal data sources (facts. strenghts. weaknesses. vulnerabilities. resources. purposes hopes and dreams inside the community).

2.   STEP TWO - THE KICKOFF: (COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOP)

The next step. is to invite community leaders who have been identified as being active; that is. compassionate competent. creative. respected. future-oriented. influential and likely to contribute to a meeting whose goal is to discuss the future of the community. Invite perhaps five times as many as

you would like to attend the session, as it is better to have too many people than too few. Attendance is encouraged by the preliminary "compilations" and invitation materials mailed out, follow-up phone calls, assurances that attendance will not result in being "button-holed" into doing follow-up tasks, strict time limits, dinner or refreshments provided, and spouse or friend also invited. Because these people appreciate getting "right to the point," it is generally better not to include creative little simulations and hypothetical situations, although "ice breakers" may be useful, but to deal directly with the community itself, now and in the future.

The kickoff event may vary in length depending upon the circumstances, the size of the community involved, and the level of anticipated ease at arriving at consensus. Average time for a kick-off event is about 3-5 hours. At the kick-off event, main points of gathered data should be displayed on posters or newsprint so that participants can walk around from display to display, conversing about the information that will help them to develop a shared community purpose and vision. The event begins with a lecture - type presentation to explain the "community vision process", and overview of the goals and objectives, the need for it, its potentials, and its ethical considerations and boundaries. For example, though there is a degree of consensus-gathering in visioning, minority opinions are to be protected and respected. An excellent complement to this presentation is Joel Arthur Barker's (1990) video recording, "The Power of Vision."

Whoever facilitates this "kick-off" event sets the tone for the whole program. It is important to insure the participants that there is not going to be a "hero" or authoritarian director in charge of the meeting. The role of the community educator is that of facilitative, supportive, and communicative as opposed to being directive, and controlling.

The advantages of being proactive, as opposed to majoring in maintenance and remediation, should also be stressed. This is definitely a group effort and all input and contributions are valued. Knowing the purpose (the reasons why we exist as a community) helps us to be proactive, resourceful, and economical in decision-making and the action planning process. Purpose provides a frame of reference for managers, leaders, and voters, and a foundation upon which to build a clear vision of where we want to be as community in 15 years. "Visioning" is a future-focused, proactive process that can empower communities to take charge and creatively shape their own futures, rather than being caught off-guard unprepared by future changes, or even by the fragmented responses of being reactive to the many events of today.

Community leaders may better understand why they have been chosen, rather than representatives from neighborhoods, if one of the models of sociology is presented. Rogers, (1976), Houle (1980), and Cervero (1988),

explain that change is most likely to actually be implemented in any organization or society if the proposed change is studied and accepted by its innovators and pacesetters before leaders attempt to get the majority and laggards to make the change. (See FIGURE 1. for Houle's Sociology Frame of Reference Classification.)

The community educator explains that the innovators and pacesetters have been invited to develop a "vision", taking into consideration all the data and input that has already been gathered and summarized. The general population will have continuing input as they study and make suggestions concerning the shared purpose(s) and visions that will be generated.
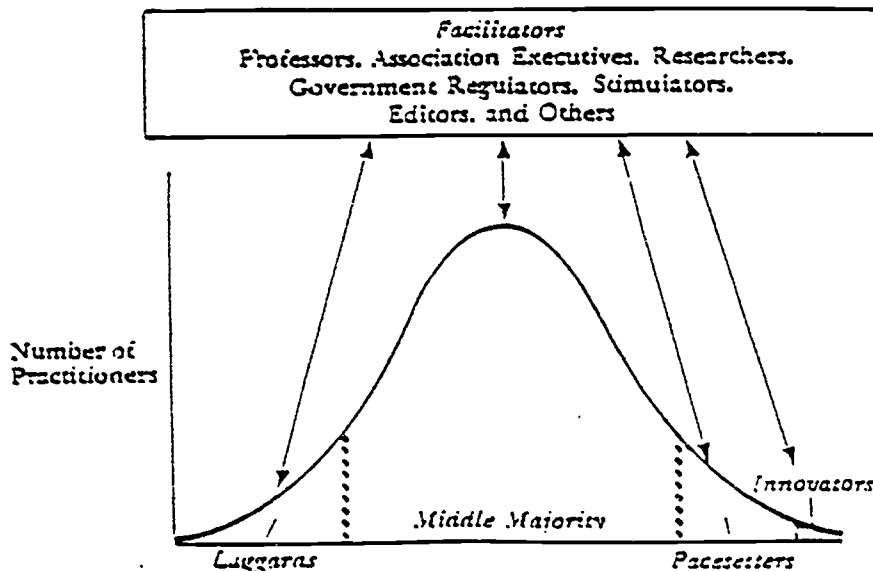

FIGURE 1.   Professionals classified by degree of openness to change (Houle, 1980 p. 155).

Next, the community educator describes briefly the tasks of the community visioning and action planning process, and facilitates the process as the group undertakes and completes each task. The tasks are outlined at that **first meeting** as: A) to develop shared community purposes, B) to detail a broad based vision for the future, C) to organize the vision into themes, and D) to develop a broader vision for a particular theme (Adapted from Leuci, Wade and McCall, 1991).

A) TASK 1 -- DEVELOPING SHARED PURPOSES FOR THE COMMUNITY

The community leaders are asked to form small groups and then describe the purposes of their community -- why their community exists. Groups inscribe their purpose statements on newsprint and then tape the statements to the walls for the whole group to view.

Some groups make need several illustrations of community purpose statements to get them started. The community educator / facilitator encourages discussion of the various purpose statements. Similarities are noted between purposes, and among these and the preliminary data gathered from the community. The major purpose statements are combined, or eliminated as the group grapples with which are the most important, most inclusive, or most relevant to the needs, hopes and dreams of the people of their community. Some communities may reduce their statements to one concise shared mission statement while others may find it more meaningful to include a number of alternative, even conflicting purposes as part of their community's reason(s) for existence.

B)   TASK 2 - DETAILING A BROAD - BASED VISION FOR THE FUTURE:

Next, community leaders are asked to think into the future say 15-20 years. and to try to describe, based upon the shared purpose(s) of their community, the ideal future of their community. This may be done either in small groups or as one large group. Broad participation is encouraged, and all suggestions are written down on newsprint without any evaluative judgements given, even if they conflict. All the components of the vision are then hung on newsprint or posters displayed on the walls for the whole group to view.

C)   TASK 3 - ORGANIZING THE VISION INTO THEMES :

After detailing the vision, the community leaders are next asked to try to discover themes that emerge from the vision described on the newsprint sheets hanging on the wallls.   Themes are listed on the flip chart in front of the group, and the community educator / facilitator encourages discussion about which characteristics of the vision that (seem to) fit under various themes. (Examples of themes to expect are: education, economic/business development, community spirit/pride, community leadership, and so on).

D)   TASK 4 - DEVELOPING A BROADER VISION FOR EACH THEME:

The purpose of this task is to develop goals and measurable outcomes for each vision theme. To do this, **the community leaders are now asked to select a particular theme task force with which to work.** Each task force then lists all the components of the vision that they will claim responsibility for as part of their special theme. The group

then brainstorms a list of activities and projects that could be accomplished toward achieving any or all of the aspects of the theme on their list. If time remains, each group reports back to the larger group. Finally, the group members are invited back in 2-4 weeks, or whatever time is necessary to gather additional feedback from the community for the follow-up meeting. During this interim, the important questions raised are: 1) What data has been gathered from the initial meeting? 2) Has all the necessary data been compiled accurately? 3) What is to be done with the data? 4) How will the data be evaluated? 5) What then are the next steps?

STEP 3. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK PROCESS.

Following the first general meeting, the shared purposes, theme generation, and list of potential projects, and goals are then complied into an attractive pamphlet or "visioning book" to be distributed to the community. Using informal organizational networks (clubs, societies, businesses, associations, schools, and churches), community information input is gathered from as large a sector of the community as possible. Community members are asked for suggestions of ways to improve the vision, things they would like deleted, modified, expanded, reduced, and about possible projects or goals which they might like to help to accomplish. This data is then compiled by the community educator, synthesized, and distributed to the community leaders who participated in the kickoff event to be reviewed for the follow-up action planning event.

STEP 4. - THE ACTION PLANNING PHASE OR (FOLLOW-UP MEETING):

The major purposes for the follow-up meeting are to first, to revise the community vision from various community sources, and then to develop detailed action agendas for working toward realizing the vision. Community members, representatives of community organizations, or of the media, not originally involved in the planning session, may request to attend or make their voices heard at this follow-up meeting. These actions should be welcomed. At this meeting, input data from the community is discussed and changes are suggested, considered and incorporated. This is done either by the larger group, or by the theme task forces and then reported to the group as a whole (Leuci, Wade, & McCall, 1991).

Next **the theme task forces** select priority projects to tackle, and develop detailed action agendas for each project proposed. Elements included in the action agendas are: resources needed, tasks and activities described, persons responsible, target dates suggested, energy factors, communication

and networking, and one central repository for anyone's suggestions, grievances, or data updates. The action agendas have two main parts, one for implementing the planning, monitoring, tracking, and evaluative process; and the other for implementing the project goals and sub-goals (objectives).

STEP 5. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS:

With a clear vision of what they want to become, broad input from the community, and concrete action agendas for moving toward the "vision", the community is now ready for action! Hopefully, some leaders have been willing to make tentative short-term commitments to continue during the action phase. Others from the community have volunteered to assist in various ways with particular projects and goals. Numerous human and financial resources are already in place, as well as a plan for monitoring and evaluating the process (a tracking system). The next phase is action, followed by further revisions, and adaptations as circumstances, society, and the community's vision changes.

STEP 6. MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PROCESS AND CELEBRATE:

As the action phase gathers momentum, the vision process is not set aside and forgotten, but rather now becomes an ongoing process, with a constant evolution of projects and people moving in and out of leadership and worker roles. This is a time for celebration. The results of the project action plans are monitored, evaluated and corrected as time goes by. An anniversary community visioning workshop may be scheduled "to see where we are now" and to formulate new plans and programs for the future.

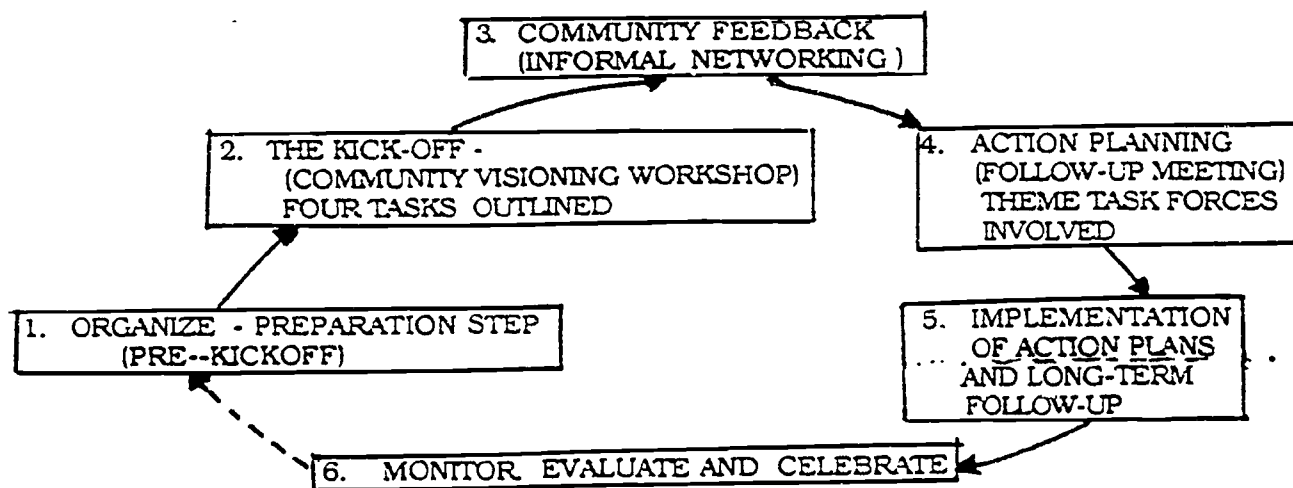FIGURE 2: below illustrates the steps of the Community Visioning Model

FIGURE 2. The Community Visioning Phase Model

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

This paper raises the question of whether community educators, along with business and other fields, as well as business and community leaders may need to reexamine the traditional needs - based or deficit - planning processes. The community visioning model presented in this paper, represents an attempt to provide a proactive, future oriented planning model. The planning process has been presented in a sequential and rather "orderly" manner. However, in actual implementation, the community educator(s) may find it necessary to adapt, contexualize and revise to meet local community settings. No planning approach can fit all situations. In some situations, steps in the model may need to be shifted, or eliminated all together. In other contexts, perhaps another visioning model would be more appropriate. Despite the tentativeness of the model components, our intention was to present an alternative to the traditional needs-based or deficit - planning process so familiar in the community education literature.

The model, in addition to presenting an alternative to traditional needs based approach to planning, also reexamines the role of the community educator. The visioning process takes the community educator out of the community school and causes him or her to become a facilitator of education in the community. Through the "community visioning processes" the community educator (CE) keeps communication, cooperation, collaboration, networking, data-sharing and reinforcement moving among all sectors of the community and/or the external community. This true community education process gathers, processes, displays and returns data to itself, the data bank, the populace, and the community leaders. The community educator facilitates the community visioning process, though preliminary material and the kick-off event - preparation phase. The community educator receives feedback on the vision (or alternative visions) from the populace. The community educator facilitates revisions, refinements, or consensus on the shared vision, and encourages discussion and protection of interests and concerns for those who do not participate in or share in the community visioning process at this time - but allows the door open for their input and suggestions later. The community educator then facilitates goal setting, task(s) formation, task assignments, monitoring, tracking, and follow-through. The community education process offers educational experiences to foster growth toward the shared vision. Community education also aids in encouraging networking and communications among all community sectors on a perpetual basis and keeps the data bank current. Finally, the community educator facilitates reinforcement and the evaluation and celebration process. In short, through "the community visioning process" community education can become a pivotal, empowering force for and within the community.

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