ABSTRACT
        In an era of rising public criticism of education and
decreasing resources, strategic planning can be a major tool for
educational administrators who wish to respond to the increasing
challenges their adult literacy programs face. Strategic planning can
be defined as a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions
and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it
does, and why it does it. The strategic planning process includes
designing, implementing, and monitoring plans for improving
organizational or program decision making. Although various writers
specify different numbers of steps in a strategic planning model,
they generally agree on the following core activities that must be
addressed: (1) reaching initial agreement among all the planning
committee members; (2) defining the program or organizational mandate
and mission; (3) formulating program objectives; (4) conducting SWOT
(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis; (5)
developing strategies and an action plan; (6) implementing the plan;
and (7) monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the implementation.
Each of these activities has its own subprocess or substeps that need
to be followed carefully. Strategic planning helps literacy program
administrators to develop a clear vision of what their programs are
about, who they serve, and in what ways. It also helps link this
vision with the activities that will implement it. Strategic planning
also helps administrators collaborate and communicate with relevant
agencies, develop realistic goals, and develop an implementation
strategy. Strategic planning is an extensive process that ensures
program survival and growth in a rapidly changing environment.
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Research To Practice

ED 378 443

ADMINISTERING ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

by Steve Olu Michael

Introduction

Planning is not new to educational administrators; it's certainly not new to adult literacy program directors. The task of developing curriculum, hiring staff, recruiting students, and turning out graduates requires planning of some sort. Slevin (1979), however, recognized the difference between the act of planning consciously and the practice of muddling through: "Planning is an integral and central function of every manager's task. If you don't plan, you become a crisis manager, responding to rather than driving the environment of your job" (p. 15). Nelson (1986) observed that "educational institutions and other nonprofit enterprises have not historically been strong in defining priorities and tacking into the winds of the future confident of their course" (p. 54). But in the business world, managers who are interested in driving the environment of their markets, defining their priorities, and tacking into the winds of the future have found success with the application of the strategic planning technique.

Strategic planning can become a major tool for educational administrators who wish to respond to the ever-increasing challenges besetting their programs. The need to plan strategically becomes crucial in a rapidly changing (and a less predictable) environment. For over a decade, educational administrators have been wrestling with increasing costs and less than adequate revenue. The resultant financial constraints are occurring at a time when public criticism of educational productivity is at an all-time high. In addition, other demands, such as health care, crime prevention and reduction, and deficit reduction are exerting increasing pressure on public spending. These demands have continued to compete for resources available for educational purposes.

Consequently, progressive and prudent educational administrators have sought and continue to search for planning and management techniques that will not only ensure the survival of their programs, but also enhance their visibility and effectiveness. Among the techniques widely acclaimed as relevant and helpful to educational administrators is strategic planning. As far back as 1986, McCune observed that "a few farsighted school

ntendents experimented with
;ic planning with varying levels of
s" and that "an estimated 500 school
ts currently engage in some form of
;ic planning" (p. 31).

se

e purposes of this short piece are to
/ describe what strategic planning is
ow it can be useful to adult literacy
am directors. This paper attempts to
le only an overview of this important
ing technique, but hopefully,
nistrators will begin to appreciate how
option of strategic planning can help
e some of the frustrations identified in
: and Rasinski's (1994) "Family
cy Programs: Getting Started," an
: publication.

gic Planning Defined

:cording to Bryson (1988), strategic
ing is a "disciplined effort to produce
mental decisions and actions that
: and guide what an organization (or
entity) is, what it does, and why it
it" (p. 5). Simerly (1987) adds that
gic planning "is a process that gives
:ion to (1) designing, (2) implementing,
3) monitoring plans for improving
iizational [or program] decision
ng" (p. 1). Strategic planning is not
azard; rather, it is a disciplined effort
sequential steps of actions. If done
ctly, strategic planning will result in
urable progress or growth for adult
cy programs.

egic Planning Models

here are different models of strategic
ning, each with varying degrees of
istication. Some models contain as few
e steps, but other more complex

models may have more than 10 steps. The
number of steps notwithstanding, writers
generally agree about the core activities
that must be addressed in strategic
planning. The Figure provided below
illustrates elements commonly found in
most strategic planning models. The core
activities include: (a) reaching initial
agreement among all the planning
committee members; (b) defining the
program or organizational mandate and
mission; (c) formulating program objectives;
(d) conducting SWOT analysis, an acronym
that stands for the analysis of Strengths,
Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats;
(e) developing strategies and an action plan;
(f) implementing the plan; and (g) monitor-
ing and evaluating the outcomes of the
implementation.

Each of the steps identified above has its
own subprocess or substeps that need to be
followed carefully. For example, the
process of defining the institutional mission
requires (1) the clarification of the
mandates, i.e., what the program must
accomplish; (2) the formulation of a vision,
i.e., where the planners see the program will
be at some future date (usually five to ten
years); and (3) the articulation of the vision
in terms of a mission, i.e., what the program
will actually do.

The process of conducting SWOT
analysis is also an elaborate one. SWOT
analysis covers both the internal and
external environment. Analyzing the
internal environment involves auditing the
program's resources and unique
advantages. The result of this exercise will
reveal both the strengths and the
weaknesses of the program. Analyzing the
external environment involves auditing the
stakeholders' concerns and the political,
economic, and social factors that may
impact upon the program. If done correctly,

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                                    (d)
                            ┌─────────────────┐
                            │    External     │
                            │   Environment   │
                            │    Analysis     │
                            └────────┬────────┘
   (a)              (b-c)            │↓
┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐    ┌────┴────┐         (e)    ┌─────────────┐
│ Initial  │ →  │ Defining │ →  │  SWOT   │ → ┌──────────┐→│ Formulating │
│Agreement │    │the Mission│    │ Analysis│   │Aggregating│ │ strategies  │
└──────────┘    └──────────┘    └────┬────┘   │    and   │ └──────┬──────┘
                            ┌────────┴────────┐│prioritizing│      │
                            │    Internal     ││  issues  │       │
                            │   Environment   │└──────────┘        │
                            │    Analysis     │                    │
                            └─────────────────┘                    │
                                    ↑                              │
                                  (g)                            (f)│
                            ┌──────────┐          ┌───────────┐   │
                            │ Evaluate │ ←────────│ Implement │←──┘
                            └──────────┘          └───────────┘
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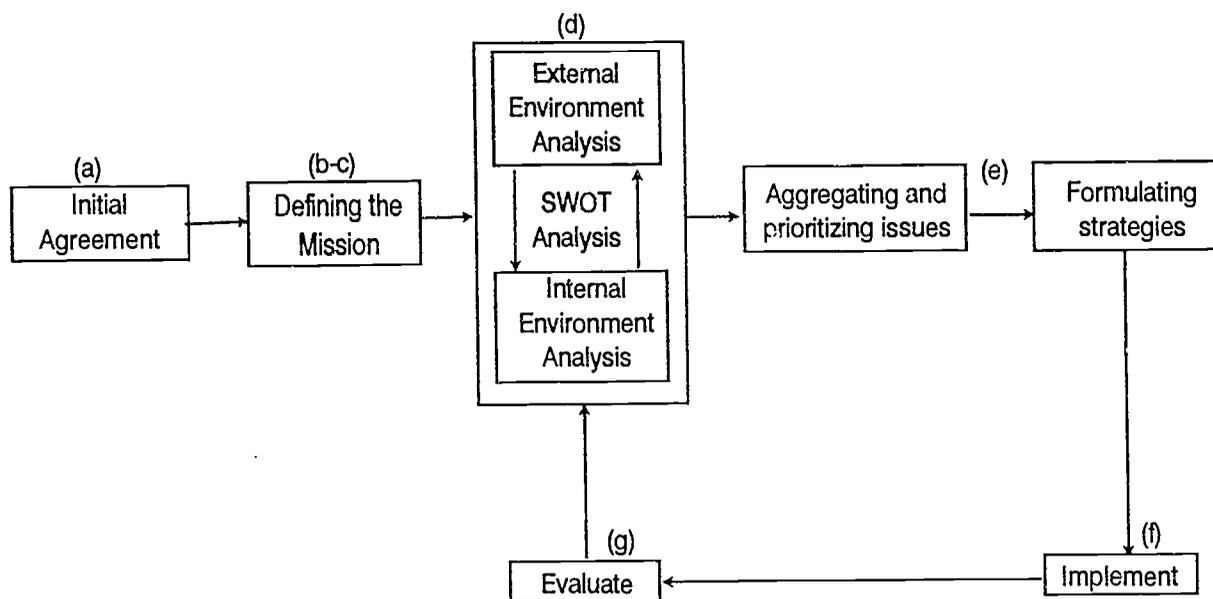
Figure: A Strategic Planning Model

the analysis of the external environment will reveal the opportunities open to the program as well as the threats to program success that administrators must consider.

The major task before strategic planners is to optimize the benefits presented by the opportunities in the environment, while at the same time reducing the threats or converting them into further opportunities. Program planners are able to convert threats into opportunities by improving their program's strengths and working on their weaknesses.

Specific Benefits of Strategic Planning to Program Directors

In responding to several "frustrations" expressed by adult literacy program directors, Padak and Rasinski (1994) advised that "one of the most important solutions was to develop as early as possible a clear vision of what the program was about, who it served, and in what ways"

(p. 3). Developing a clear vision is wise advice for educational administrators, and strategic planning provides a technique for developing this vision and for linking the vision with all the other activities that will ensure its adoption and implementation.

Several other insightful suggestions are offered by these authors: collaborate and communicate with relevant agencies, develop realistic program goals, and develop an implementation strategy. Strategic planning, if done properly, provides a systematic way of implementing these suggestions. This planning technique provides the opportunity not only to identify relevant agencies, but also to identify and prioritize issues of concern to all stakeholders. By formulating a mission statement, a background is provided to ensure appropriate and realistic program goals. By considering budgetary details and other implementation matters, strategic planning ensures that the planning effort will result in concrete actions.

Conclusion

Strategic planning is an extensive planning process that ensures program survival and growth in a rapidly changing environment. It offers a rational basis for resource allocation and provides both rational and political approaches to issues aggregation and strategy formulation. Strategic planning provides many advantages to adult literacy program directors who wish to become proactive in their planning efforts and who wish to prolong the life of their adult literacy programs.

During the 1994 Leadership Academy, Dr. Michael presented a workshop on Strategic Planning. This publication is a culmination of that Academy.

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