

Strategy Mapping During Fiscally Challenging Times

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is important for managers to focus on improved performance measurement systems to motivate staff and develop resources. At some point, managers are forced to streamline and change operations to keep up with fiscally challenging times. A successful project must have a focus, active participation, timelines, a feasibility study, a way to measure expected outcomes, and a mechanism for conducting follow-up.

Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) managers are at the beginning stages of implementing the strategy mapping method to help their organization chart a comprehensive strategy for achieving their goals. Strategy mapping helps organizations to determine how to get from point A (where you are) to point B (where you want to go).

A strategic theme is developed that is connected to the mission of the organization. Implementing the strategies requires choosing the initiatives, establishing targets, validating the cause and effect relationship, and defining the timeline.

Strategy mapping ensures that EHSD initiatives are balanced across the business process, instead of focusing only on supporting their clients. Strategy mapping provides a clear road map for all staff in the organization by defining the department's key strategic goals and initiatives.

The strategy-mapping concept is an important tool for leaders to improve and resolve fiscal, programmatic and performance problems within their organization. Strategy mapping may prove to be an essential component of surviving and thriving during uncertain economic times.

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Background

One of the biggest challenges for human service managers today is managing the operations of a large organization with budget shortages. At some point, managers may have to streamline and change operations. Managers will need effective planning tools to assess, retool, redeploy, and possibly consolidate personnel and services for the survival of the organization. This will require managers to drill down to the most essential functions and focus on the highest priorities.

Focusing internally will improve day-to-day operations and customer relations, and it will boost morale. Problems that prevent effective service delivery must be addressed. If not, these problems could cripple the progression of the organization. The Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) has chosen to tackle such issues through strategy mapping.

Introduction

Strategy mapping is a tool that helps organizations chart out a comprehensive strategy for achieving their goals. Managers who seek to reach their desired outcomes must have a useful plan of action. Strategy mapping helps organizations translate their mission into strategy.

An important factor in Contra Costa County's plan is that the EHSD director endorsed the strategy map concept: leaders must support and spearhead new initiatives to acquire buy-in from all stakeholders. EHSD managers are currently at the beginning stages of implementing their strategy maps. They use a balance scorecard to measure success from four different perspectives: customers; finances; internal process; and, learning and growth. These perspectives are linked together through a "cause and effect"

relationship. The following four perspectives support their agency's mission:

- **Customer** The core element, and is the group for whom value is created.
- **Financial/Fiduciary** This is how "sustainable growth" will be created for "shareholders"
- **Internal** The process in which value is created and delivered
- **Learning and Growth** This is how people, technology and organizational climate support other strategies

Developing the Strategy Map

A key component of the strategy map is to know who the stakeholders are.

EHSD has identified the following stakeholders:
Service recipients

- Board of Supervisors
- State and federal government
- Public/taxpayers
- Employees and EHSD Staff

The above stakeholders will be impacted by the outcomes of the strategy maps. The strategy map provides a guide for how to select which activities will engage the organization to achieve its mission. Strategies are expressions of intent that lead to specific improvements in desired and necessary outcomes. This strategic synergy of activities is more effective and sustainable than an individual activity. EHSD managers have identified a few significant processes that are critical for achieving the agency's mission statement: the learning and growth perspective, the internal process perspective, the fiduciary/financial perspective, and the customer service perspective.

ESHSD managers want to create an organizational culture that places a high value on customer services; therefore, the internal process perspective

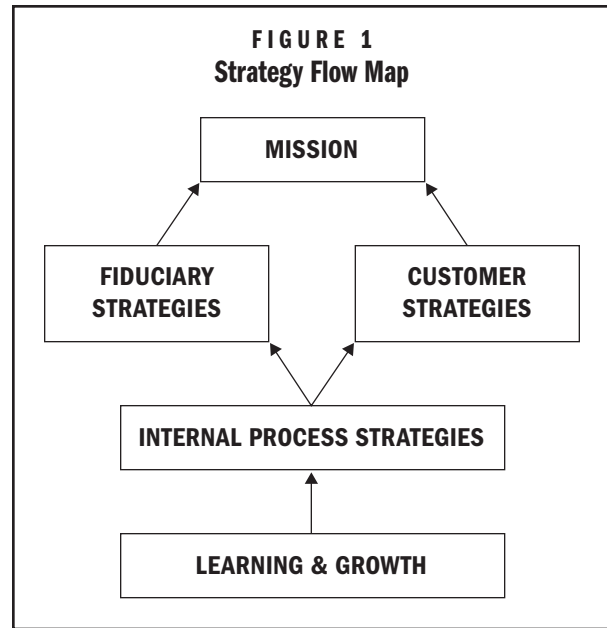
focuses on supporting staff skill and career development. Managers must clearly and consistently communicate their strategic priorities and implementation requirements. These priorities are monitored regularly. The internal process perspective requires managers to look at ways to maximize resources through administrative streamlining and to increase the efficiency of business processes. This can be achieved through internal collaborations with other departments. A review of the technology tools will increase the effectiveness of the project, help staff manage their workload, and improve client access to services. Managers must also have the ability to recruit, hire, and retain a qualified workforce. Once this phase is developed, it leads to one of the remaining perspectives: the fiduciary or customer strategies.

The fiduciary perspective aims to achieve administrative costs savings while minimizing the impact of budget reductions on services and staff. This can be achieved by expanding the use of state and federal funds to generate new revenue opportunities.

Lastly, the customer perspective deals with the core purpose of the strategy maps. EHSD managers have identified several main services that can help persons-in-need access basic services in a timely manner. All program areas must be taken into consideration. EHSD managers want to provide effective protection and support to vulnerable children and adults; to provide quality customer services by treating clients with dignity and respect; to provide effective support to assist clients in taking personal responsibility for themselves and in moving towards self-sufficiency; and, to improve public understanding and support programs through external partnerships and new communication technologies. Overall, the four perspectives on the strategy map support EHSD's mission statement: In partnership with the community, services are provided that support and protect adults, children, families and the elderly and promote personal responsibility, independence, and self-sufficiency.

Strategy Flow Map Format

See Figure 1.



The Model Explained

The core strategies cannot be implemented unless they are quantified; if they are not quantified, they are simply expressions of intent. Implementing the strategies requires choosing the strategy activities, establishing the targets, validating the cause and effect relationship, and establishing a timeline for action. Each strategy must be translated into an action. EHSD managers conducted an inventory of all current projects and initiatives in which 67 initiatives were identified. The mandatory or completed initiatives were grouped into separate categories. EHSD managers obtained input from line staff on a final prioritization of the remaining initiatives by allowing the Eligibility Technicians (ET) to vote. Collectively, they identified 14 "High Priority" initiatives that included: an on-line scheduling system, ACCESS CalWIN, Benefits CalWIN, and CWS/CMS web. Each initiative is charted on a matrix and has a formal project structure with an "Executive Sponsor," an ET, a project manager, and a project team. The lists of strategic priorities and the success of individual projects are reviewed on an annual basis. Project teams gather input from internal and external affected stakeholders.

Each project will have a project forum that is established in the Knowledge Management intranet site. Project teams use this site to post materials and to collaborate on documents. This allows staff an opportunity to stay updated on initiative changes and ideas that are being shared. It is important to mention that the strategy map project have well-defined roles and responsibilities. There is an Executive Oversight Group (EOG) that reviews the proposed projects and makes important determinations.

A scorecard was developed for evaluating requests and assigning priorities. The project manager assigns a score of 1 through 3 for each criterion for projects that are categorized as mandated. The criteria on the scorecard are rated and weighted. They are not only based on a combined score but also on the net priority (e.g., need, cost, benefit, effort, impact, and risk). EHSD managers sent line staff a survey to obtain their input on high priority initiatives. They also created a list of action plans for each strategy initiative.

This project received ongoing support from the EHSD's Information Technology Division (ITD). ITD currently maintains a queue of application development projects that have been requested by the various bureaus. All projects are assigned an executive sponsor and a project manager who is responsible for monitoring progress and making monthly reports to the EOG. Projects that have a high level of visibility, benefit or impact and that require more than forty hours of cross-departmental staff effort are not given immediate action. Projects that will take less than forty hours of cross-departmental staff effort are placed on an accelerated schedule. Only projects that are given the highest priority are given the maximum available resources to ensure timely implementation. The intents of this process are to ensure that available resources are deployed to support the priorities of EHSD and to have EOG and ET actively support the priorities.

Lessons Learned

The obstacles that EHSD have encountered thus far are staff not being clear about the process and a steady reduction in administrative and technical positions available to carry out the individual projects; however, they were able to narrow 67 initiatives down to 14. Since the 14 initiatives were complementary to each other, it enabled the EHSD to maximize their potential benefit; as a result, they developed an online training application. The mapping method ensured their initiatives were balanced across the business process, rather than focusing on one aspect of supporting their clients. Most importantly, it provided a clear road map to define the departments' key strategic goals and initiatives. Overall, EHSD managers have met their expected outcomes of identifying and reducing a large number of strategic initiatives into a core set of initiatives that are complimentary to each other. The project is continuous, and it will take time to develop the strategic initiatives before EHSD managers can get results that truly maximize their return on resource, time and staff investments.

Recommendation

Alameda County Social Services Agency could benefit from this design. It provides an opportunity for the agency to resolve problems on a long-term basis, to work cohesively across departments, to promote buy-in from all staff for the agency's vision, and to measure performance in all dimensions. Overall, there is very little to implement the strategy map method.

Conclusion

The human services industry is constantly changing; eventually, managers will no longer be able to support continuing in their current business processes. I think EHSD managers have made a commendable effort to solve systemic problems that exist in public service agencies.

Acknowledgements

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