Strategic Thinking for Radiology

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THINKING and planning are activities that we perform every day. The sequence in which we complete our thinking and planning steps is an important factor in achieving maximum effectiveness. Ideally, we should devote an adequate amount of time to thinking about all sides of a particular problem before progressing too far with planning or implementing a solution. Many of us learn this lesson the hard way. We sometimes forge ahead with elaborately developed plans before focusing enough attention on thinking about what we ultimately hope to achieve with our plans. We then find ourselves going back to the beginning to rethink our options before resuming the planning and implementation processes.

STRATEGIC THINKING TOOLS

To aid us in the process of strategic thinking, we will use a set of strategic thinking tools or frameworks. One of the most attractive attributes of the strategic thinking tools presented below, is that they can be used by radiologists possessing various levels of business education and experience. The tools are easy enough to be understood and applied by radiologists who have had no formal business training.

The broad acceptance of these tools comes from the fact that they are easy to learn and highly effective. Essentially, this is because the tools communicate at a fundamental level between people. For example, in a regional healthcare community, where people possess diverse backgrounds, these tools enable the players to cross boundaries and effectively relate at a common, fundamental level.

BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC THINKING TOOLS

The tools in this article can enhance several aspects of organizational behavior and effectiveness. In describing the most tangible benefits gained by using these tools it will be helpful to use an example. Let's select as an example a strategic thinking tool known as the Vision Statement (Purpose and Mission), developed for radiology.

THE RADIOLOGY VISION

Purpose

The purpose is to provide continually improving healthcare decisions, in imaging and treatment, in the most cost effective manner to an ever increasing patient population.

Mission

Combine technology, clinical service and socioeconomics to optimize value.

Achieve strategic value by becoming healthcare information managers.

Establish the radiologist as a primary team member connecting diagnostic information and the patient.

Be a visionary planner by adapting behavior modification to effect change in healthcare.

Actively support the investigation, discovery and development of new technology.

Educate the radiological community and its customers to influence and manage the destiny of radiology.

The benefits of using Strategic Thinking Tools are as follows:

- (1) Developing a common framework for solving problems: The Vision Statement provides a framework in the form of a Purpose and a Mission.
- (2) Identifying a common language for addressing problems: The language consists of Purpose, Mission, and the specific terminology used. For example, Healthcare Information Managers.
- (3) Thinking with simultaneous focus and flexibility: Focus is derived by having a framework. However, in establishing the content (eg, elements of the Mission), there is flexibility for individual input as team consensus is developed.
- (4) Stimulating creativity in problem resolution: The creative process is derived from having a team brainstorm the content within the framework.

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- (5) Communicating by asking the right questions to find the right answers: The questions raised by the Vision Statement tool are: What are the Purpose and Mission elements to support the Purpose?
- (6) Promoting teamwork in problem solving: Teamwork is established as the process moves from individual input to consensus of the final result.
- (7) Establishing team confidence in the problem solving approach: Confidence is achieved as the consensus process is carried out. The use of a framework is essential to organize individual inputs into a consensus.
- (8) Building a foundation for future problem solving: As situations change (eg, environmental factors) an up-date of the Vision becomes appropriate. The foundation established in creating the initial Vision makes this an efficient and effective process.
- (9) Providing outlines for planning: As noted above, the tools promote "doing the right things." Planning, the process of "doing things right" follows. The Mission elements are the right things to do.
- (10) Focus on customer satisfaction: A meaningful Purpose will always focus on the customer, as in The Radiology Vision. The subsequent development of the Mission elements ensures that the focus on customer satisfaction is brought to fruition.

OTHER TOOLS

The High Five

The High Five tool raises the following question, "What are the five factors guiding a customer's decision to make a purchase (product or service) decision? The reason for "five" is that usually three are too few and seven are too many.

Who would be using this tool? The manufacturer would use the tool to ensure that the company is meeting customer needs. The radiologist would use the tool to develop objective consensus within the team (radiologists, administration, etc) as to which product or service the team should select.

Two-by-Two

This tool provides the user(s) with an approach to subdividing a complex problem into simpler steps. For example, if one is considering a picture archiving communication system, the key factors

for achieving productivity are Technology and Re-engineering of Process. Considering these factors as horizontal and vertical axis, provides four simpler possibilities: Old Technology/No Re-engineering of Process—this represents "business as usual"; New Technology/No Re-engineering of Process—this represents "low value"; Old Technology/Behavior Modification—this category was labeled as the "direction of Mayo." The meaning behind it was that at any level of technology the Mayo system strives to achieve the optimum in productivity, by driving re-engineering of process to the level of behavior modification; New Technology/Behavior Modification—this category represents increasing productivity by a combination of selection of new technology and achievement of behavior modification.

Real-Win-Worth

This framework is useful in making a team decision as to the advisability of expending resources (dollars and manpower). "Real" looks at the existence of the item in question. "Win" looks at the entity involved in the decision and how it can benefit from the decision (often versus its competition). "Worth" addresses the ultimate question of return on investment.

SUMMARY

We have now analyzed the use and benefits of four Strategic Thinking Tools for Radiology: the Vision Statement, the High Five, the Two-by-Two, and Real-Win-Worth. Additional tools will be provided during the tutorial. The tools provided above should be considered as examples. They all contain the 10 benefits outlined earlier to varying degrees. It is extremely important that the tools be used in a manner consistent with the Vision Statement of the organization. The specific situation, the effectiveness of the team, and the experience developed with the tools over time will determine the true benefits of the process. It has also been shown that with active use of the types of tools provided above, teams have learned to modify the tools for increased effectiveness and have created additional tools for specific purposes. Once individuals in the organization become committed to improving communication and to using tools/frameworks for solving problems as a team, effectiveness becomes boundless.