Development Suggestions for Systems Thinking

Suggested Readings

Title	Author	Learning Mode
Competing for the Future	Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad	Book or Audiobook
The Balanced Scorecard	Kaplan and Norton	Book or Audiobook
Introduction to Systems Thinking	Daniel Kim	Book
Fifth Discipline	Peter Senge	Book

Activities

1. Read the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) legislation and accompanying documents and guidelines from OMB and GAO. Examine several agencies' Strategic Plans on the Internet and assess their conformance with GPRA, especially their emphasis on results important to citizens.

2. Read and reflect on the USPTO Strategic Plan. Examine the goals of your office and determine if they align with the agency's strategic goals. If you think that there is only a tenuous linkage, initiate a dialogue on the need for linkage between office goals and agency goals

3. Read a book on strategy and systems development. Considering what you read, outline an approach that you will use for doing strategic thinking and planning for the next fiscal year.

4. Based on discussions with colleagues, reading and examining information on the Internet, list the global developments that you anticipate will affect the work of your office over the next 5 to 10 years. Plan steps that you will take (or urge your managers to take) based on your analysis.

5. Volunteer and become involved in the update of your strategic plan. If this is not possible, interview those involved in strategic planning about their views of the threats and opportunities that USPTO faces over the next 5 to 10 years.

Development Suggestions for Systems Thinking, continued

6. Connecting all the activities/processes to the "big picture" of the organization is important for the following reasons:

    - It is a method to ensure that every action is value-added.
    - It lessens the amount of time and effort wasted in unproductive activity.
    - It provides a framework for thinking about each activity and process making the relevance of each clear.
    - It invests everyday activities with meaning and significance.
    - It raises the likelihood that even the smallest tasks are performed well and with pride.

7. Periodically benchmark your programs and practices against those of other organizations.

8. How do you know when a strategy or course of action is not effective? While they might be clear in retrospect, it is hard to see the signs of decline when they begin. To view strategies objectively, try focusing on the future, rather than on the present.

    - Visualize the organization and the economy 10 years hence; 20 years; 50 years
    - Can you see instances where current strategy, if maintained, could be detrimental down the line?
    - How far into the future do you believe current strategies will be effective? Your answer will indicate if a strategy or course of action is already becoming obsolete.

9. Periodic strategic conversations with employees to reinforce the importance of anticipation of the future and continuous improvement in preparation for it are highly recommended. Some of the topics for discussion should include:

    - What future challenges or changes do we anticipate in our part of the organization?
    - What will need to change about how we do our work to meet these challenges?
    - What will be more effective ways of accomplishing our work?
    - What do we need to do to prepare?

- Examine the adequacy of your organization's work plan:

  - Does it align with the strategic goals of the agency?
  - Does the plan clearly state the annual goals and objectives?
  - Do the goals and objectives meet or exceed customer needs?
  - Are the key tasks and activities necessary to achieve the goals and objectives outlined with due dates and names of responsible persons?

  If inadequacies exist, work with a team of employees to improve the plan and implement the changes. Have the team communicate the planning information to the rest of the organization and explain the changes.

- If a work plan does not exist for your organization, initiate a planning process to develop the above-listed components. Involve as many of your employees in the process as possible. Also, include staff from other organizations who depend on your organization for products or services or on whom your organization depends as suppliers. Examine the plans of other organizations and determine their strong and weak points before embarking on your planning effort.

- Meet with your employees and clearly state the plans, policies and priorities of the organization. Make sure that everyone knows what you expect from him or her. Also, ask your manager and peers what they expect of you and your organization.

- Volunteer for participation on a strategic planning work group if the opportunity arises. If your agency has already developed their strategic plan, interview members of the committee that developed it. Ask about the process, the lessons learned, what went right, what went wrong, etc.

- Using project management tracking systems, continuously evaluate how well the organization is doing in achieving its objectives. Have regular review meetings and take corrective action where work is falling behind or objectives are not being met.

- Examine successful projects to identify factors accounting for success. Communicate this information to everyone in the organization.

- List the resources that will be necessary to reach objectives and decide how to obtain each resource. Request that each employee specifies his or her resource needs to accomplish assignments.

- Get copies of the work plans or strategic plans of departments or organizations with whom you work (e.g., your suppliers or your customers). See how their goals and objectives coordinate with those of your organization. Discuss the alignment or discrepancies with the managers of those departments or organizations.

Development Suggestions for Systems Thinking, *continued*

- Set up an inter-organizational workshop on goal-setting, accomplishing, evaluating, and allocating and sharing resources.

- Assign your employees to work with others outside your organization to gain experience in coordination and cooperation.

- Observe a particularly skilled cross-functional team leader to understand what accounts for effectiveness in that role.

- Participate in activities initiated by other parts of the organization to maximize exposure to them.

- Benchmark similar organizational units within and outside the agency to understand how they measure performance.

- Learn about techniques to measure qualitative and quantitative performance outcomes; the difference between strategic and diagnostic measures; and how to collect the data needed to track the measures. Start with a book on performance measurement like Kaplan and Norton's The Balanced Scorecard (Harvard Business Press, 1997).

- Involve employees in the development of organizational performance measures and ensure that each understands how performance is measured.

- Provide positive and constructive feedback on a timely basis to subordinates involved in projects. Solicit their input to understand their perceptions of critical outcome and process measures of their organizational contributions.

- Volunteer to participate on organizational task forces that develop measures of program efficiency and effectiveness.