

Strategic Planning – 5 Dangers of Cheaping out on Hiring a Facilitator

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An organization contacted us about facilitating a large, multi-organization strategic planning session. They ultimately decided, since the timing was tight and a lot of the details hadn't been decided, to facilitate it themselves internally.

Shortly after the meeting, I heard about it via a couple of participants. Fifteen minutes was scheduled for introductions. TWO HOURS LATER, introductions wrapped up. Turns out, getting nearly two hours behind at the meeting's start was the highlight of the two-day experience. It was supposedly all downhill from there, with a lot of questions about what, if anything, came from flying a large number of people to a relatively remote location in the middle of the country to meet.



Have you been in one of “those” meetings previously? I know I have.

While it seems like anyone can facilitate a meeting (I mean who CAN'T stand in front of a group and write things on a big pad of paper), it's just not true that anyone can.

Strategic Planning and 5 Dangers of NOT Hiring a Professional Facilitator

When an organization tries cheaping out and not using a strong professional facilitator who can design and carry out an interactive strategic planning session, it COSTS an organization in at least five big ways:

1. You burn up participant goodwill

You may have only one shot to get a board or other stakeholder group to agree to participate in a strategic planning session based on their interest in the organization or initiative. If you frustrate them with an unproductive meeting, you COST yourself important goodwill you may have built up with them.

2. You don't make a big enough and sustainable enough move forward

If a strategic planning session is really intent on driving big change, frittering away the opportunity to harness the expertise you've assembled to pave the way for big change will COST time and positive returns as you wait to cycle back until your next opportunity to push for big change.

3. You blow through opportunity or hard dollar costs

Even if you think you are not writing many checks to pay for your strategic planning session, there are still opportunity costs for the participants' time investments. When a poorly designed meeting wastes the time for the participants, it COSTS you because you send a clear signal that you don't respect their time investment in what you've asked them to help accomplish.

4. You stretch patience, not imagination and creativity

When a poorly designed strategic thinking session fails to push an organization's imagination and creativity in a productive way, it winds up pushing the wrong buttons instead, i.e. impatience and boredom. The COST comes from failing to excite the organization to grow and develop to be more competitive and successful.

5. Stakeholders won't take it seriously in the future

When you summon people for a strategic planning meeting and it goes nowhere, the next time you try to do the same thing – even if you have stepped up to using a professional facilitator, you will have COST your organization the active participation of stakeholders you burned previously. Why should they believe the next time will be any different? And you've not only tarnished their enthusiasm for your organization's strategic planning efforts, you've done it for any other organization for which they may be involved.