

Project Pointers

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Decisions, decisions...

Decision making involves uncertainty and may result in high risk consequences. And, each alternative path brings its own concerns in the midst of complex, interrelated factors. So it is not surprising that we often delay or avoid the process.

The previous newsletter focused on the value of asking good questions, specifically those related to prioritizing programs and services. This issue continues the discernment theme by presenting two simple, straightforward methods for approaching tough decisions. While these approaches have been used for years, it helps to return to the basics during challenging times.

Reframing Matrix

This tool is especially useful when we need to look at an issue from different perspectives. When working with a team, it can be difficult to capture the various opinions and comments of all members. You may have asked each person to present an exaggerated proposal or position specifically to ensure lively discussion. As with all serious matters, sometimes the most difficult step is identifying the problem. The Reframing Matrix expands the range of creative solutions the group can generate by asking four questions, the Four P's:

1. Program perspective: Is there something wrong with the program or service?
2. Planning perspective: Are our strategic, business, marketing, and development plans effective?

- Potential perspective: If we were to seriously increase the clients served or number of offerings per client, how would we achieve these?

People perspective: Why do people choose our services or programs over those of another nonprofit?

An example of a nonprofit's Reframing Matrix follows:

Reframing Matrix Example

<p>Product Perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop title clear? - Grounded in research? - Marketing materials attractive? - Appropriately priced? 	<p>Planning Perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approaching the right markets? - Using language that's parent-friendly?
<p>Problem: Low attendance in Parenting Skills workshops</p>	
<p>Potential Perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to increase sales/enrollment? - Collaboration opportunities? - Related brochure sales? 	<p>People Perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How have attendees evaluated workshop? - Do they feel it's practical? - Why are they choosing other parenting services or products instead?

This tool can easily be modified to add new "P's" that are relevant to your mission. The above four perspectives are standard, but there is no maximum number.

PMI Worksheet

While the Reframing Matrix lays out the issues for discussion, you will also need to think about whether a choice will actually improve a situation. This may require the addition of an evaluation or assessment strategy through a tool such as the PMI Worksheet, a valuable method for weighing pros and cons.

Do you make lists with plus and minus columns, then find yourself making all sorts of notes in the margins? This probably occurs because you are trying to bring more meaning to what you wrote in each column. Another way to achieve this is by scoring each entry.

In the Plus column, write down all positive results of taking an action. In the Minus column, write down all of the related negative effects. Then, in the Interesting column, write down implications and possible outcomes of taking action, whether positive, negative or uncertain.

At this point, it may be obvious what you should do. If not, assign a numeric value to each, using a range of 1 to 10. For example, if a proposed program change requires the development of a lengthy volunteer training workshop, the score may be -7. For your overextended volunteer coordinator, this program change might make it impossible for him to meet current commitments.

An example follows:

PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) Worksheet Example

Decision or Question: Should our Cincinnati nonprofit expand beyond three Ohio sites to add an Indiana office?

Scale 0= Lowest 10= Highest

Plus	Score	Minus	Score	Interesting	Score
Potential client base	+4	Donor confusion during capital campaign	-4	Relationships with OH colleagues	-2
Targeted services; little duplication	+5	Complexity of funding and reporting (two different states)	-7	Impact on staff applicant pool	+2
Available leasing space; lower \$ per square foot than Cinti	+4	ED's limited relationships with IN leaders	-5	Increased advocacy audience	+3
Proximity to other IN providers	+1	Absence of IN members on Board	-4	Enhanced research, publishing, presentations	+1
Possible expansion of collaborative funding options	+4	Added time commitment for staff	-5	Impact on discussions with potential merger partner	-7
Marketing/PR opportunity	+3	Limited IN transportation options	-3		
		Travel, meetings, communication doubled	-5		
Total Scores	+21		-33		-3

This exercise is highly subjective and you can create any numeric scale you wish. If you come up with a strongly positive score, you probably will take that action. If your evaluation results in a high negative score, you and your team will think twice before pursuing it.

The above tools may appear overly simplistic, especially for readers who have experience with sophisticated planning tools. But as nonprofits confront more complex and confusing realities, focusing on the heart of issues will enhance decision-making.

Wishing you a summer of fun and clarity,



Workshop Announcement

Project Management Workshop

**Marta's popular Successful Project Management workshop
will be offered on**

Thursday, December 9, 2010 - 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

at The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati

3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500, Cincinnati, OH 45209

Register online at: [Workshop Registration](#)

Resource Highlight:

Looking for a new place to eat or a new menu for your meetings?

I want to recommend Washington Square Cafe and Catering in Burlington, especially for northern Kentucky colleagues. Joyce McNeely, long time nonprofit professional, has recently opened the café in Burlington's historical district. The restaurant offers a cozy atmosphere for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or Sunday brunch. Joyce also provides catered meals for your board meetings or special events. Please visit the website:

www.washingtonsquarecafeandcatering.com

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