

## ISSUE 1, JUNE 2003

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Nexus News*. This quarterly newsletter focuses on common and current issues that face public sector organisations.

### FAILING TO PLAN, PLANNING TO FAIL

Planning workshops are supposed to generate business plans that give organisations clear strategic direction. More often than not, though, the results are more solar powered torch than guiding light. In this first edition, we'll examine why.

The purpose of annual planning workshops is to create a business plan that determines an organisation's strategic direction over the coming year. Workshops normally occur over two days at an off site location. Free from the work environment's distractions, executives discuss where their organisation has been and, more importantly, where it's heading.

While good intentions are rife, the business plans that emerge from such 'Leura love ins' are often converted into glossy brochures that are scarcely read, let alone implemented by anyone in the organisation.

Strategic plans that don't get converted into action are common, and are caused by one or more of the following reasons.

#### *Poorly planned workshops*

Many organisations see workshops as the starting point of the planning process. However, if no pre-planning has occurred, the process is in danger of falling flat.

Items for discussion are often formed in haste by an executive a day or so before the workshop. However, such autocratic agendas inevitably focus on issues considered unimportant by the rest of the organisation. The result? Unread, unimplemented business plans. Yet when staff are involved in adding to the agenda, you have the starting point for discussion on genuine issues.

Also, organisation-wide participation, from the pre-planning stage onwards, will help ensure organisation-wide buy-in come implementation time.

#### ADDING VALUE

At Nexus Management Consulting, we assist organisations to change for the better through providing a range of services in the following areas:

**Strategic & corporate planning**, to enable you to create and achieve your organisational aspirations.

**Program evaluation**, to ensure your goals, strategies and outcomes are on track.

**Management review & organisation development**, to help you cultivate a self-sustaining, inclusive organisational environment.

**Group facilitation**, to ensure your meetings and focus groups adhere to a relevant agenda and produce meaningful results.

**Strategic management training**, to transfer skills so that your organisation develops the internal capacity to create enduring change.

*Unstructured workshops generate unrealistic plans*

Participants often view workshops as an opportunity to present a shopping list of what they believe should be happening in the organisation. While a certain amount of philosophising is healthy, if it's not kept under check discussions can wend their way into the unrealistic.

If too much time's allocated to *what* everyone wants, the chances of coming up with a plan specifying *how* to achieve such goals are negligible. Rather than issues being raised in an impromptu way, they should form part of the agenda to which they, and other staff and key stakeholders, have contributed.

*The planning process is not properly embedded into the organisation's culture*

In reality, staff are disassociated from the planning process. Therefore, cynicism about the relevance of plans is acute amongst staff, especially those who have seen business plans come and go with little or no effect on their work environment. The good news is that if efforts are made to bolt down business planning so it becomes part of an organisation's wider culture, then modest gains can and will be made.

To succeed, the planning process must be integrated into the organisation's formal and informal processes. For example, relevant projects borne from the plan can be incorporated into individual performance reviews. This imbues business plans with a sense of purpose. In addition to being properly reviewed, projects must be adequately resourced. There needs to be clarity on each individual project's timeline, who's involved, who's in charge and who's footing the bill.

*Plans aren't written in plain English*

A business plan has two functions, to explain 1) where the organisation is heading and 2) by what means it, as an organisation, intends to get there. Complex language isn't necessary to relay this, and serves only to alienate and confuse staff. All jargon-filled business plans express is a rhetorical commitment, whereas those written using plain English can be used as a working map.

#### HOW NEXUS CAN HELP

By using our services, public sector and community organisations take the first step towards change for the better. [Email](#) to find out how we can help ensure a meaningful outcome from your organisation's next planning sessions.

#### CONTACT US

Please direct your ideas and comments to [gmasters@nexusmc.com.au](mailto:gmasters@nexusmc.com.au). If you'd like to see an article covering a particular issue, please let us know.

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#### ABOUT NEXUS MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

Established by Greg Masters in 1996, Nexus is a management consultancy based in Sydney, Australia.