

The Goal-Setting Process:
An Executive Summary of Halpern's 1987 Master's Thesis

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Introduction/Overview

Topic of the Thesis

This topic described and analyzed the goal-setting aspect of the preferred-futuring process. Halpern (1987) described it a volunteer, collaborative, community-wide citizen effort designed to choose the future of the community by developing collective images preferred for the area by the year of 2000 (p1).

Halpern (1987) defined futuring as a process of evoking a creative vision of a desired outcome seemingly already achieved at a specific time in the future. It combined a set of procedures for reviewing the past, present and current trends which would affect the future as preparation for taking a mental leap into that preferred, accomplished future (p4).

Definition of terms

Community Assembly – information feedback loop in preferred futuring process, an event at which information developed previously made available to the participants.

Futures (variation) –Halpern (1987) noted future research is the academic terms for the field, particularly in the United States, as is future Studies, a more modest designation.

Fowles (1978; as cited in p3) stated that futuristic is the term preferred in the Soviet and Eastern Europe.

Futuring session – a meeting in which individuals work through a sequence of exercises to arrive at collective visions of a preferred future, and possible steps toward realization of a selected vision.

Preferred futuring – a process of evoking a creative vision of a desired outcome seemingly already achieved at a specific time in the future.

Proud and sorries – a listing, usually produced via brainstorming, of what is like (or proud of) and disliked (or sorry about) in viewing a current situation.

Methodology

Halpern's method consisted of four steps. First, she used brainstorming techniques and analysis of past and present trends to shape a preferred and workable vision of the future. In a community-wide application of the preferred futuring process, citizen groups throughout the community were invited to participate in the focus groups. Trained facilitators led the groups. Through a series of exercises, participants, using the rules of brainstorming, were asked (1) to focus briefly on the past, (2) to consider the present about the community and the quality of life in it, and then (3) to project preferred futures by taking a trip ahead of time, describing alternative desired views of life in various aspects of the community. Participants were given instructions for the trip ahead of time. Some examples of instructions were: It is the year 2000 and you are aloft in a balloon, looking down on Ann Arbor. For this trip you have special abilities: you can see and hear whatever you wish to see and hear. Observe and describe everything in the

present tense that you see, or hear, or smell that pleases you very much. Make your descriptions as specific as you can (Halpern, p30-31).

In the second step, she prioritized the future images generated during the focus group idea generation. Out of the collective data of all the groups came the beginning of the transition from image to shared vision.

Third, based on the data from the previous step, outlines of the scenarios and goals were created. Halpern had trained scenario writers develop the scenario by analyzing and incorporating the image into the alternative scenarios of the future.

Fourth, those scenarios were presented at a Community Assembly for information feedback and action-planning sessions. At the Assembly, volunteer Task Forces were formed to support particular scenarios. They were charged with determining the steps necessary to connect the images to action in the direction of actualizing the preferred future, and then acting on those steps to help the image come to pass.

A3-2000 Project

Early in 1986, a small group of Ann Arbor community leaders met informally to discuss how area residents might have input into shaping the future they wanted. Various alternative measures were available to design A3-2000. The group chose the preferred futuring process, advocated and previously utilized by University of Michigan. Professor Emeritus Ronald Lippitt, whose organizational consulting expertise and academic credentials figured in his selection as the external consultant to A3-2000.

By September 1986, a project director was hired, and the project was publicly launched. Letters went to 1,000 community organizations to inviting their leaders and

membership for the futuring sessions. By the end of February 1987, approximately 2,000 people joined futuring sessions.

The role that Halpern played within the organization was not mentioned. However, judging from her contributions mentioned, she seemed to participate in designing all of the activities in A3-2000. Halpern examined:

- (1) The sequence of steps of the process,
- (2) Demographics concerning the participants,
- (3) The area of training: of facilitators of futuring sessions, scenario writers, table facilitators and Task Force leaders at the Community Assembly, and initial training of Task Force Co-conveners.
- (4) Images of the future and resultant scenarios,
- (5) Initial goal statements of Task Forces,
- (6) The communications process involved, and
- (7) Other elements of the process (p36-37).

Funding

The project was initiated without a firm commitment of the sources of funding. Nine organizations and one area foundation contributed sums up to \$3,000. Additional organizations and a few individuals contributed smaller sums. There was no organized campaign to solicit funds from individuals. A3-2000 had a first year budget of \$91,000, including \$42,000 in cash. Six months after the community assembly, A3-2000 owed approximately \$12,000.

Description of Ann Arbor community

Ann Arbor is located in the southern part of Michigan. Surrounded by rivers, forest, lakes, and farmland, Ann Arbor has a population of 108,000 (1980 census; as cited in p32), yet retains the comfort of a small town.

The University of Michigan is one of the largest employers in the area. The University plays a key role as a magnet for cultural activity, such as museums, libraries, theatres, and art, which in turn has spawned good restaurants and shops. The population is diverse, educated, articulate, and with a tradition of participation in civic affairs.

The city building department issued permits for more than \$30 million in commercial construction in 1986. The economic picture of Ann Arbor is far from bleak.

Ann Arbor: Goal setting and A3-2000

Rationale of A3-2000

This study is relevant to Creative Problem-Solving because it examined and illustrated the goal-setting process utilized in preferred futuring; and this process employed a number of creative techniques, including visualization, brainstorming, future oriented thinking, and the focus on generating alternatives.

Subproblems for this study were (1) to determine the noteworthy elements which enabled the process to work; and (2) to determine other salutary features, if any, of the process beyond the desired formulation of goals.

The first hypothesis was that attention to the key elements served to enhance and fine-tune understanding of the process. The second hypothesis was that by-products of the process, beyond the desired formulation of goals themselves include formation of communication networks; enhanced self-esteem, and growth of skills of participants.

Participants

Halpern (1987) reported that among those who participated in the A3-2000, the largest segment (25%) were age 36-45, with another 40% evenly divided among 26-35 and 46-54 year olds. Seniors (over 65) constituted 5.6% of those who participated in A3-2000. More than half (52.6%) were female, 13% black, and 83% white. Two-thirds were employed. Almost 30% identified themselves as students, while almost 3% identified themselves as handicapped. 70% resided or worked in Ann Arbor (p57-58).

Conclusions

Major outcomes

There were three major findings and four supplementary one in this study. Halpern (1987) summarized the statistical data that 87% found the assembly quite stimulating; 79% felt it was action-oriented; and 91% believed it was very well organized. In addition, almost all (94%) viewed participation in the assembly as worth their time away from other responsibilities (p59).

Her finding also indicated that 89% believed the assembly had an overall positive impact on themselves, while 86% rated the potential impact of the assembly on the Ann Arbor area as great (p59).

Finding of A3-2000 project confirmed that the goal-setting aspect of the preferred futuring process was effective in establishing goals, derived from collective preferred images. Halpern (1987) suggested that further research over time to determine the degree to which the goals were realized (p59).

Limitations

African-American and other minority groups, labor and less educated population were under-represented. Participation by University of Michigan students, faculty and staff was lower than might be anticipated in a university town, which may have reflected their

perception of the University as their universe. The supplementary findings are;

- Interviews with 15 individuals who participated in A3-2000 project confirmed the perceived value in the formation of networks as a result of the futuring experience.
- Enhanced sense of self-esteem was mentioned as a salutary result of the process.
- Another result was that the preferred futuring process itself was a learning tool. After exposure to the procedure in futuring sessions focusing on the Ann Arbor area, a number of participating organizations then used the process to examine their own organizations.
- The energy and interest that emerged from the sessions provided new resources to be channeled toward making Ann Arbor and the five surrounding communities a dynamic area and a rewarding place to live and work.

References

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