

# CREATING A POLICY AND CULTURE OF ADAPTIVE PERFORMANCE

*Policy development is a full time effort for community and organizational leaders. When we do it well, we build on common agreement to solidify our mission and vision, affirm our commitment, establish a sound framework for procedures and allocate our resources wisely.*

Policy is the framework that guides our action. It's a model of the big picture that helps us to integrate and affect multiple issues on all levels of the enterprise. Effective policy is created and matured through an on-going cycle of design and development, implementation, evaluation and revision. We can enter into the policy cycle at any point and foster a culture of adaptive performance where stakeholders tune policy to meet the demands of a changing world.

## IN THE ABSENCE OF WELL DEFINED POLICY

Even in organizations where policy is ill defined, de facto policy always exists. Without a clear policy, stand-in policies may get pieced together by competing elements seeking influence within the group. Some of these may be historical artifacts of past administrations. Some may be created by well-intentioned managers and staff trying to fill the policy void. Self-interest may establish opportunistic agendas. All of these conflicting policies create an atmosphere of internal competition that fragments efforts, wastes resources, fails clients and depletes the strength of the organization. Without the determined vision of leadership, organizations patch together solutions the best they can but these patchwork policies can never lead to success.



## THE FOUNDATION OF ADAPTIVE POLICY

The opposite of this patchwork approach is a policy that proactively addresses the dynamics of change on a daily basis. You can

create an adaptive policy by working towards these criteria and conditions:

- Have a clear process for creating the policy.
- Provide clear criteria for choosing issues.
- Policy issues must be priorities to the group
- Policy must reflect your mission and the values
- Policy must be relevant to contemporary issues.
- Policy must be clear and consistent so that its implementation can be measured.
- The policy must be made readily accessible to all concerned.
- To achieve these goals, all parties who hold a stake in the policy need to be consulted.
- Policy must do what it's supposed to do.

## ADAPTIVE POLICY PROCESS

You can create an exemplary policy by following this plan for success. First, create a working environment in which stakeholders become consultants to the policy process. Within that environment, determine the issues the policy must address. Then, prioritize their importance so they can be developed in a meaningful way. Review present policy to understand how it currently address the issues.

When these critical issues have been defined, set goals that define how you want things to be. Then, after the issues have been explored and goals established, develop action plans. Structure these plans in a sequential process that, in light of current conditions, best converts your resources into your desired goals.

This matrix of issues, goals and actions forms the core of all strategy and policy. Once it exists, research and develop strategic relationships to explore alternatives and their implications. When this is done, create a

template for the final draft of the policy. By now, the big picture should be clear. When a clear, draft policy exists, have your stakeholders review it. Revise it, as needed, based on their analysis.

Adaptable policy is more than just planning. Once created, it must become the engine of operations. Putting it into practice tells us what works and what doesn't. As policy becomes practice, monitor your efforts to assure criteria are met. Collect feedback from stakeholders to measure and evaluate performance. Based upon their observation, change and refine your policy to respond adaptively.

This policy cycle of listening, responsive design, implementation, and evaluation is how we effectively address the needs of stakeholders. It's how service is improved. We can also use it to groom a high-performance team to adapt to change with steady, incremental improvement.

## CONSULT EACH OTHER

Can leadership make policy by itself and get the job done? Can one individual or even a small group envision all of the complexities of current issues? The knowledge that runs our organizations is broadly distributed throughout our people. Those with the hands on experience have the critical knowledge we require to create adaptive policy and performance.

Calling upon the knowledge of this critical population helps our policy efforts in multiple ways. First, we acquire a broad, inclusive vision of relevant issues and factors. Our policies can be built from the highest caliber information available. We discover hidden expertise, fresh ideas and innovation we may not have been aware of. By consulting the stakeholders, we also promote a deeper understanding of the organization's issues and operations with those who care the most. This results in a dialog of alternatives and options in which best practices naturally emerge. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the growth of

trust and mutual respect within the organization. When stakeholders are consulted, consensus emerges. Constituents eventually arrive at a mutually held position that enables them to share ownership of the policy. This commonwealth of shared values can champion the policy process and see that it adapts and endures in the face of on-going change.

## CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT OF CONSULTATION

To claim these benefits, create an atmosphere in which stakeholders willingly contribute to the policy-making effort. This is the most challenging phase of policy development. If we succeed, we can build an internal momentum that will carry the effort through to success. Focus on these steps and construct a policy vision with those who can bring it to life.

Bring everyone who can contribute to the policy-making process. Establish a clear timeline so that stakeholders know when and where they can participate in the process. Scheduling is critical since it determines if important stakeholders can contribute or not. Engage a competent and experienced facilitator to see that your meetings are fair, productive and content centered. Be consistent, on time and to the point. Don't allow things to ramble. Value your stakeholder's time and they will value the process.

Formalize openness, trust, integrity and mutual respect. Stakeholders must agree to support these values through the process. Give participants clear mandates regarding their roles. Adhere to these values through every meeting. Provide your stakeholders with a fair environment and your policy will reflect these values.

When a draft of the policy is completed, share it with your stakeholders. Make sure people review what they've created. Invite response and explore improvements. Buy in begins when stakeholders are invited to contribute. It

matures into ownership when they see the fruits of their efforts.

Policy development can be time consuming and expensive but its results are invaluable. It never evolves in a vacuum. It's created in the midst of existing responsibilities. It may require consultants, facilities, surveys and a range of expenses. Budget for these costs and provide for the development effort's needs.

## IMPLEMENT THE POLICY

Now that you have a policy, deploy it. Review your current policy. Keep what works, lose what doesn't. Develop new action plans that leverage your resources to achieve your goals. In view of the issues you're facing and the goals you want to achieve, create an effective process that converts your current situation into how you want it to be. Carefully allocate your resources. Establish criteria for quality and performance milestones to help you monitor performance. Then, put the policy into practice.

## MONITOR AND EVALUATE YOUR POLICY PERFORMANCE

Build an organizational culture that values and reward performance. Actively gather feedback about how the policy is working. Identify problems and discover their causes. Establish a dialog about best practices. Listen to your people. If you ask, the system will always tell you what its doing.

## REFINE YOUR PERFORMANCE

No matter what we set out to do, it typically takes more than once to get it right. Policy is an art we mature on the fly. As we stay in tune with our system and evaluate our performance, we steadily and incrementally improve our skills. Refinement has two essential rules: don't waste time trying to fix what already works and if it's broken, come up with a solution and put it in place.

Keeping in touch with stakeholders keeps you in tune with what needs to be done. Maintain this contact and you'll maintain your adaptability. Learn to recognize multiple issues that might be leveraged or combined to increase your effectiveness. Keep improving performance until you achieve optimum operations. Adaptability is evidence that your organization is mastering the policy cycle.

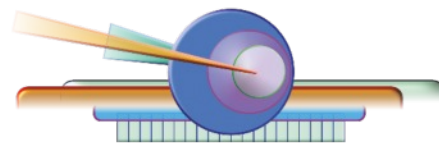
## ADAPTIVE POLICY IS A WORK IN PROGRESS

The demand to adapt is unrelenting, so stay current with the changing trends. Encourage and reward clear thinking and effective service on every level of the organization. Look for examples of adaptive success and hold them up for the appreciation of others. Also identify elements of your system that throttle performance. Discover the basis of the problem and fix it. Evaluate performance and respond with ongoing training and constant, incremental improvement in system wide skills. Policy management is all-inclusive. Every part of your organization contributes or detracts from your adaptability.

Not everyone in your organization will be able to understand the importance of this all-inclusive cycle of policy and adaptation. Leadership must. Organize your stakeholders to create an adaptive policy. Implement that policy in a high performance culture. Lead your team through steady, incremental improvement. Mature the creative capacity of your organization. Cultivate leaders who culture adaptive behavior. Then, change and be prepared to change again. The core competency of the future is adapting to change.

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