Risk: The Missing Link Connecting Strategy to Implementation

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Introduction

In today's increasingly complex, fast-paced environment, your association's success is contingent on your ability to make good decisions quickly. Today's competition is tougher, and our financial margins are thinner, so we simply can't afford to tread water or fumble our way through decision-making. This is equally as true for the high-level decisions that boards and management teams make around strategic direction as it is for the everyday tactical decisions that staff and volunteers make as they implement those strategies. Increase the quality and speed of your decisions system-wide, and your association will see better results.

At an intuitive level, everyone understands this, but, in our long experience as staff, volunteers, and consultants in the association community, we've observed that few associations pay serious attention to learning how they make decisions. Over the years, we've come to the conclusion that bad decisions are not just due to the competence—or lack thereof—of the decision makers. It's not about not being smart enough or not having perfect ideas. Decisions go bad for a whole host of reasons:

- Different definitions and perceptions of risk
- Different understandings of what you're trying to accomplish
- A culture of avoiding conflict
- A misunderstanding of what consensus is—and is not
- Difficulty managing information
- Lack of courage
- Unwillingness to experiment, learn, and iterate

That first one—risk—is critical. Making decisions means making choices. Unless you have perfect and complete knowledge of the future, which none of us does, making choices will necessarily involve uncertainty. Because no one can know what will happen, there's always a chance things won't go according to plan. Risk represents uncertainty about the potential for loss or gain. Think about your association: Does everyone understand and feel the same way about risk? Are you even all aware of the full range of risks you're taking? Does everyone know the difference between an acceptable risk and an unacceptable one? If you want to make good decisions as an organization, you need to be able to answer all those questions in the affirmative, which requires embedding risk, risk management, and risk assessment and analysis into decisions at both the strategic and implementation levels. As we will describe below, that will require confronting some of the other problems in the list above, like conflict, consensus, and organizational learning.

We'll also look at the implementation side, providing some concrete tools you can use to help everyone in your association integrate risk into your decision-making conversations. Our goal is to help you understand how having better conversations around issues related to risk, risk management, risk appetite, strategy, conflict, and consensus can help you achieve the ultimate goal of learning how to make better decisions faster in service to your association's mission.

Risk and Strategy

Risk, Risk Management, and Risk Appetite

Risk, according to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), is the "effect of uncertainty on objectives."[1] To break down this definition, *effect* means a positive or negative deviation from what's expected. *Uncertainty* is a lack of information that leads to inadequate or incomplete knowledge or understanding. An *objective* is what you want to accomplish. Risk, then, is neutral, neither good nor bad; it is just a range of possible outcomes.

Associations face all sorts of risks, often classified as operational risks or strategic/business risks. Operational risks include things like fraud, workplace safety, discrimination, antitrust, theft, natural disasters, technology failures, and data errors. Generally speaking, these are the kinds of risk we attempt to address through policies and procedures or insurance. For instance, you reduce the risk of embezzlement by separating the duties of writing checks and reconciling bank statements. In order to protect your board members and other volunteer leaders, your association probably maintains Directors & Officers (D&O) liability insurance. Policies and procedures strive to minimize exposure to risk, or at least to the potential negative impacts of taking the risk of being in business in the first place. Insurance provides a funding mechanism to pay for any insurable losses.

Associations also face strategic risks, related to things like brand and reputation, changing business models, deciding which products and services to offer, new or changing markets, changing stakeholder demographics, competition, pricing, partnerships, alliances and mergers or acquisitions, technological innovation, and socioeconomic and political trends. Dealing with these risks is more complex, as you have to align these risks to your strategy, and you can't just call your insurance agent and get a policy to cover uncertainty around your association's role or mission in the future. Strategic risks require a different type of attention to identifying and managing the risks that could undermine the achievement of your strategic goals and objectives. Strategic risks change quickly, are rarely simple, and can impact everyone in the organization in unique ways.

Leading organizations use something called Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) to address both operational and strategic risks. According to the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO), Enterprise Risk Management is:

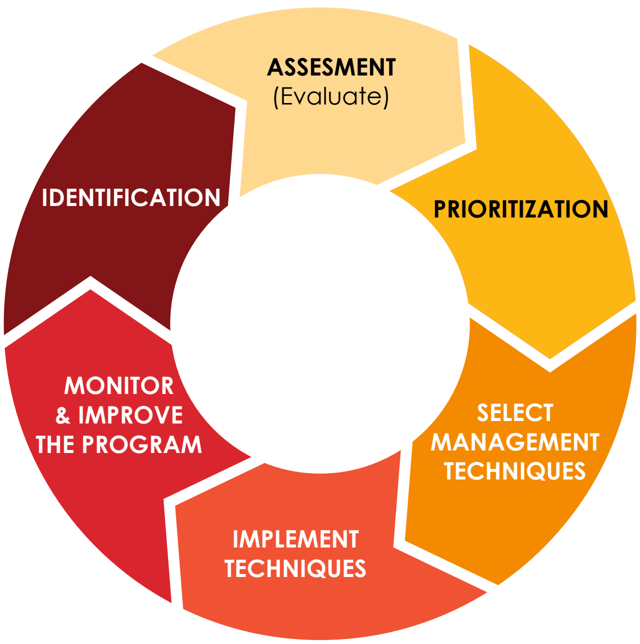
> ***"A process, affected by an entity's board of directors, management and other personnel, applied in strategy setting and across the enterprise, designed to identify potential events that may affect the entity, and manage risk to be within its risk appetite, to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of entity objectives."***[2]

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Risk
2. http://www.coso.org/documents/EmbracingERM-GettingStartedforWebPostingDec110_000.pdf

Risk Management Cycle

The risk management process involves the continuous identification, assessment, prioritization, and selection of risk management techniques; implementation; and monitoring of outcomes.

Risk Management Cycle



But what if the board and senior team members don't all agree on what the risk is, how likely it is, or what impact it might have? What if the decision-makers don't have the same appetite for risk? What if they don't accord the potential opportunity the same level of importance? Risk management sounds straightforward in theory, but the effective practice of risk management requires broadening your awareness about uncertainty and risk and integrating this risk awareness directly into your strategic decision-making. You need to define your risk strategy.

According to Ernst & Young's report "Turning Risk Into Results," "Ultimately, risk management is about changing the culture of the business. It is about changing the lens through which leaders view the decisions they make."[3] That means getting clear about your risk appetite. According to Manigent, risk appetite is "the amount and type of risk that an organisation is willing to accept, and *must take*, to achieve their strategic objectives and therefore create value for shareholders and other stakeholders."[4]

In short, how much risk are you willing to assume in pursuit of your organizational objectives?

To fully embed ERM in an organization, decision-makers must identify their key business drivers, which are the few vital factors that disproportionally influence the success of the organization. These key business drivers provide the lens through which the association views and thinks about risk. Risk appetite varies by key business driver, as well as by how much risk the organization is willing to or must take to achieve its strategic objectives. Your appetite for risk can be rated as low, medium, high, or extreme, as measured against how you rank the exposure. To illustrate, think about the different answers you might get from your board chair, your CEO, your director of membership, and your communications coordinator to the question, "What's our appetite for risk for potential damage to our brand if someone says something negative about us on social media?"

3. 8. http://www.ey.com/GL/en/Services/Advisory/Turning-risk-into-results-Managing-risk-for-better-performance
4. http://manigent.com/integrating-risk-appetite-into-business-strategy/

Strategic Planning Versus Strategic Thinking

How should your understanding of risk and risk appetite inform your debates around your association's strategy? How do risk and strategy relate to each other?

> ***"When it comes to strategy development and execution, it's important for risk to enable business performance—not simply protect the business."***
>
> Michael Herrinton
> Americas Advisory Risk Leader,
> Ernst & Young LLP[5]

A strategy is a plan of action designed to help you achieve a set of goals. The best strategies answer a few deceptively simple questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where would we like to go?
- How are we going to get there?
- How will we know we arrived?

That sounds relatively straightforward, right?

Unfortunately, associations tend to translate those straightforward questions into an overly scripted process of "strategic planning" every three to five years. The inevitable result is a long, detailed report that, in many cases, spends the next 35 to 59 months sitting on a shelf collecting dust. Risk, by the way, is noticeably absent from these processes.

That will not work in a world of rapid, near-constant, disruptive, technology-driven change. As Kotter International's Randy Ottinger points out, "One key to surviving in a world of disruption, where the external environment is changing at lightning speed, is to change the game internally. This requires accelerating your speed-of-execution as well as your agility to seize new opportunities."[6] When you're being disrupted, you can't wait 27 months for your next strategic planning cycle to come around. That's where strategic thinking comes in to play.

In 1994, McGill University Professor Henry Mintzberg wrote "The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning," for the *Harvard Business Review*. Mintzberg is not a fan of strategic planning, but he *is* a fan of *strategic thinking*. He noted that strategic planning is about analysis of data, while strategic thinking is about synthesis of those data. Strategic planning is a process, while strategic thinking is about vision, intuition, and creativity. In other words, strategic thinking is singularly focused on where you would like to go as an organization, which is the core of any strategy, and accommodates—actually, demands—flexibility in how you get there.

As opposed to strategic planning, strategic thinking is:

- Dynamic rather than static.
- Flexible rather than rigid.
- Continuous rather than episodic.
- Focused on emergent trends rather than historic standards.
- Rapid rather than staid.
- Fluid rather than fixed.
- Focused on invention rather than on reifying what already exists.
- A journey rather than destination.
- Accommodating of disruption rather than thrown into chaos by it.

Quoting Mintzberg: "Strategic planning often spoils strategic thinking, causing managers to confuse real vision

5. http://www.cgma.org/magazine/news/pages/20125215.aspx
6. http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkotter/2013/04/03/how-to-lead-through-business-disruption/

with manipulation of numbers. And this confusion lies at the heart of the issue: the most successful strategies are visions, not plans."[7]

Risk and Strategic Thinking

This brings us back to risk. Risk management is an intrinsic part of strategic thinking. When considering a strategy, you must first determine whether that strategy aligns with your risk appetite. Remember, we are advocating Enterprise Risk Management here. Strategic ERM is designed to identify anything that could help you toward or impede you from achieving your goals and make you figure out what to do about it. If you do ERM right, you will see better results. According to Ernst & Young's "Turning Risk Into Results" study, "companies with more mature risk management practices outperform their peers financially." In fact, the study demonstrates that excessive risk aversion invariably leads to worse business outcomes.[8]

The biggest challenge associations face in establishing a culture of strategic risk management is to get people comfortable thinking and talking about what could go wrong—or right—on the way to realizing your excellent new ideas. The key is to match your risk exposure to your risk appetite, while not undervaluing potential lost opportunity.

This is usually simple for operational risks. For example, no one has a high appetite for embezzlement risk. So, you create policies and procedures and secure insurance to make sure your risk exposure matches your low appetite. Since you're obviously not missing many opportunities by preventing embezzlement, this approach makes sense.

On the strategic side, however, things are a bit more complicated. For example, let's say you are considering launching a new certification program in your association's industry. This will entail some risk, because you don't know how your program will be received within the industry. Will it help you achieve your strategic objectives? The association will need to invest significant resources in articulating a body of knowledge, developing standards, creating assessment instruments including certification exams, establishing quality controls, marketing the program, and so on. And there is no guarantee that the program will generate a positive return, particularly in the early years before the certification acquires cachet in the industry. So, where does that fall within your risk appetite relative to the exposure? Does the exposure exceed your risk appetite? Are you taking on more risk than you are willing to or capable of taking? Would you be willing to invest one percent of your reserves? Ten percent? Fifty percent? Associations will rank risks and exposures very differently depending on their unique history and internal culture. What's acceptable in one association may not be in another.

But, before you answer, you also must factor in the potential value of lost opportunity. How does it change your analysis if your market is shifting, regulatory strictures are easing, and, at the same time, the educational needs of your members and other audiences are coming into sharper focus? Now a few of the "fringe" organizations (or for-profit competitors) in your field that have focused on education are poised to become bigger players in your industry, unless you can bring the full weight of your association's reputation into the certification arena. If you choose to stay on the sidelines, you may end up watching a significant percentage of your industry's fungible income shift in the direction of your rivals. Properly weighting that potential lost opportunity could change your association's appetite for the risk in question. It is critical that you account for and analyze both threat and opportunity as part of your strategic thinking process.

7. http://hbr.org/1994/01/the-fall-and-rise-of-strategic-planning/ar/1
8. http://www.ey.com/GL/en/Services/Advisory/Turning-risk-into-results-Managing-risk-for-better-performance

Strategy, Conflict, and Consensus

When we say "biggest challenge," we don't only mean the technical challenge of identifying the ideal strategy that perfectly balances risk, exposure, and opportunity. To be frank, we're not sure such an ideal strategy exists (though that shouldn't stop us from trying). Strategic thinking is hard work and requires dedication. But we also need to recognize that thinking about strategy and risk relies on a core competency that many organizations have let languish over the years: the capacity to work through challenging conversations quickly and effectively.

Strategy and risk are about choosing to do certain things and, sometimes more importantly, *not* to do certain things. Conversations about these choices are difficult because your organization naturally has a range of overlapping concerns and interests, typically represented by specific groups of people, maybe a department or a membership segment. When you have different groups representing different interests, it often leads to conflict. And most organizations don't handle their conflict well.

Conflict conversations can go off the rails in a variety of ways. People can get stuck going in circles and never come to resolution. We often give in to the temptation to stay on the surface and avoid tough issues. We sometimes quickly deflect the conflict with humor or by changing the topic. Or, the conflict simply never gets addressed at all. In the worst-case scenario, people get angry and storm off. But when it comes to important issues like strategy and risk, the disagreements can't just be ignored in hopes they'll work themselves out.

So, what do we do? We remind everyone that it's important to come to consensus.

While this sounds like a good idea, it often makes matters worse, because we have a flawed understanding of what consensus really is. In our heads, we imagine consensus as the final state we reach once we all can agree on the decision. There can be no dissent, because this is our strategy we're talking about. We *all* have to be behind it and supporting it in order for it to work, right?

For strategy to be effective, we do all have to support the decisions that are made, but that doesn't mean that we all have to agree. Michael Roberto, professor of management at Bryant University, defines consensus in a novel way that doesn't even mention level of agreement. According to Roberto, consensus is the result of a combination of two things:

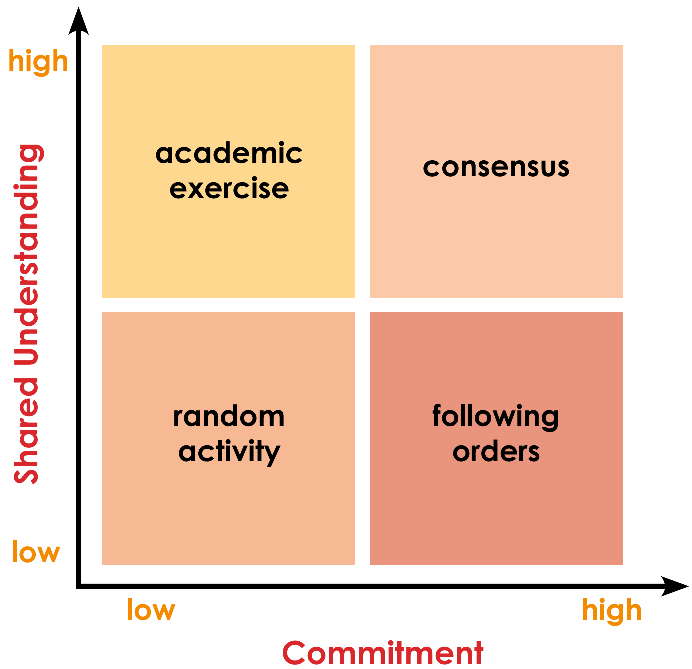
1. A high level of shared understanding
2. A high level of commitment[9]

It's not "agreement" that will get everyone behind your decision; it's combining shared understanding with commitment. If the whole group deeply understands where they disagree and why they disagree, and at the same time can generate a very high level of commitment to the decision, then you've achieved consensus.

In fact, your complex and important strategy and risk conversations will rarely result in total agreement. Some people will value the potential payoff of an opportunity at a higher level than others. Some will view the risk as more serious, or more likely, or both. So, no matter how long you talk about it, one side is going to think the attendant risk is worth it, and the other side won't.

9. Roberto, Michael. (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.) *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer: Managing for Conflict and Consensus.*

As the graph below illustrates, if you try to take a shortcut around the difficult work of creating shared understanding, at best you get people "following orders," which breeds resentment and is not sustainable over the long term. And if you don't hold out for shared commitment, you end up with an academic exercise where everyone knows the issues very well but no one is committed to doing anything about them. Does that remind you of your last board meeting? You're not alone.



That's where having a good conflict conversation becomes critical. Each side needs to be open to understanding the other side's point of view. (See the discussion below on the ladder of inference.) Why are they valuing this risk differently? On what data are those perspectives based? Sometimes in achieving this shared understanding, one side might change its mind. But even if that doesn't happen, each side now deeply understands the other's perspective, increasing the chances that they can "agree to disagree" and actually support the decision, even though it's not the one they might have made, rather than coming to ostensible "agreement" and then passive-aggressively resisting the decision with everything they have.

Risk and Implementation

While strategic thinking is critical—including those tough conversations about risk, risk appetite, and opportunity—it is also futile until it translates to strategic action. Strategy is about choice. Having a strategy implies that you have forsaken other strategies for the one you are now pursuing. You *chose* this strategy, not that one. Good strategy reflects a clear choice and is followed by disciplined action in support of that choice.

In the failed model of strategic planning, the important part, in which risk and opportunity are analyzed and choices are made, rests in the hands of a few people who do their strategy work only once every few years. The strategic direction they choose is accompanied by a comprehensive strategic plan that rigidly details all the actions to be taken by the staff and volunteers who are tasked with implementation. Those leaders spent a tough three days at their retreat figuring out the perfect strategy. They want to ensure that it gets implemented exactly as they planned, so they lay out an exhaustive list of tasks and metrics to which they can hold their people accountable. In other words, they create an intricate map of disciplined action.

This approach misunderstands how systems work. The environment in which your organization operates is dynamic. Every time you complete one of those disciplined actions, you changed the system permanently. Thus, the next step in the plan that was developed two years ago might not be relevant any more, and you simply cannot know that in advance. Because systems are moving targets, strategic thinking never ends. And it must be coupled with strategic action, which means that investigations of risk and opportunity cannot be confined to your high-level, strategic-choice conversations. Risk analysis must be embedded into implementation across your entire association.

Conflict Conversations

This brings us back to the issue of your internal capacity around conflict and consensus. As we described above, lack of clarity on what consensus means and how to achieve it means that organizations end up avoiding the honest, potentially difficult conversations they need to have about risk and strategy.

At the implementation level, organizations run into similar problems. Choices need to be made about how to implement a chosen strategy, and the people involved need to come to agreement about those choices. That tends to beget conflict, and, as we discussed above, most associations are not good at dealing with conflict. To successfully embed risk analysis into the implementation of your strategy, your staff needs to be able to identify the source of their disagreement about important decisions and work them through to the point where everyone is solidly behind the decision that's made—where you've achieved Roberto's definition of consensus.

Consider, for example, an association that is contemplating some significant changes to its annual conference and trade show. Given its particular industry, its workforce challenges, and the competitive environment in which the association and its members operate, the association's management team realized that it needed to make a bold strategic move toward becoming an educational leader in its field. So, in its high-level strategy work, the team resolved to make elevating the level of learning at the association's conference a strategic imperative for the association.

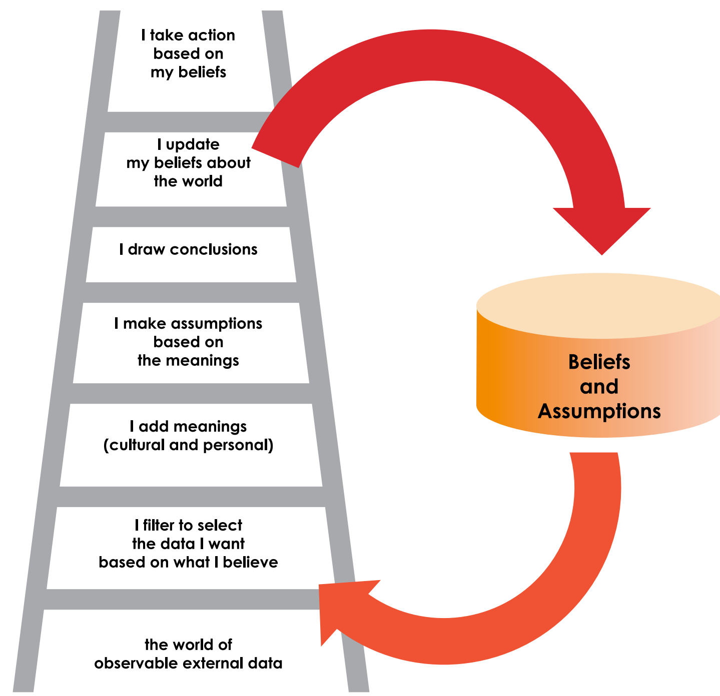
But, when it comes time to actually plan this year's annual meeting, doing things differently proves to be a challenge. The conference director argues for increasing the speaker budget to bring in high-level thought leaders to conduct half and full-day workshops, but the marketing manager points out that, on last year's evaluations, the numberone attendee request was better quality food. The VP of education proposes adding an educational component to the tradeshow floor, but the sponsorship manager worries about the negative reaction she will get from the exhibitors who feel it draws foot traffic away from the booths. Important decisions need to be made here, but there are clearly legitimate concerns and objections on every side of every decision. When your organization is ill-equipped to deal with conflict, the individual or department with the greatest internal clout tends to win. That usually means very little actually changes, since that same individual or department probably also had all the clout last year, too. The end result is that your critical strategic imperative goes nowhere.

To escape this trap, your staff members need tools to work through their conflicts, get below the surface of the original objections, and have the productive conversations about risk we've been advocating.

The Ladder of Inference

The ladder of inference is a conflict-resolution tool designed to help people get at the meaning, assumptions, and data behind the conclusions that lie at the heart of conflict. While we fight over our conclusions, we rarely explore how we came to those conclusions: the raw data we observed, the meaning we added based on our own perspectives, and the assumptions we made to fill in the gaps in our data (because we can never see the complete picture). In many cases, our most fundamental conflicts can better be resolved by having clarifying conversations at the deeper level of data, meaning, and assumptions rather than merely pushing harder for our conclusions.

Ladder of Inference[10]



Let's apply the ladder of inference to the above example of conflict around changes to an association's annual conference and tradeshow. I think we should offer education on the show floor, and you don't. I am focused on how the members will benefit from education they otherwise would not be able to access, and you are focused on the potential loss of revenue when exhibitors see us distracting their potential customers and don't come back. We both have valid concerns and goals, so we have to go deeper.

10. http://www.strategyworks.co.za/2004/11/05/the-ladder-of-inference/

Using the ladder of inference, I would ask you some questions to better understand your position and find out how you came to your conclusion. I might learn that last year's post-event exhibitor survey revealed that exhibitors' top concern was that foot traffic was decreasing at the show. Adding new data to the conversation can be an important way for people to reach the level of understanding required to ultimately come to consensus. Of course, on the specific issue of having people drawn away from exhibit booths by educational opportunities, there are no data, as we've never done it before. You made the logical assumption that exhibitors wouldn't like educational offerings on the show floor as a result, but we don't actually know that. We might find a way to test that assumption, or we might realize that we won't know unless we experiment and monitor the results.

Here is where we need to be able to have a quality conversation about risk. We need to be able to articulate the potential risks we might run and the possible opportunities we might miss if we decide to pursue (or not pursue) the experiment at hand. What if we do lose some exhibitors, but our attendees love the new educational offerings? Does the opportunity to achieve our critical strategic imperative outweigh the risk of lost revenue? Maybe, or maybe not. But now we know how to proceed: We would make some best- and worst-case financial projections, clarify our own assumptions, discuss possible alternatives and outcomes, set some goals and metrics, create some go/no-go decision points, and decide what to do.

Having these types of conversations around risk and opportunity is not necessarily easy, but it's becoming increasingly important in today's complex, mutable, fast-paced environment. You need people at all levels of your association who can analyze and make key decisions that are in line with your strategic direction, and that means they need the skills and tools to quickly get beneath the surface conclusions that create conflicts in order to resolve them, decide, and act.

How do you—and they—do that?

Ask Better Questions

Too often our questions in conflict situations become cross-examinations that are really disguised statements of opinion: "Why would you want to intentionally upset our vendor members like that?" The fundamental facilitation skill you and your team need to learn is how to ask open-ended questions that help people share the reasoning, meanings, assumptions, and data that lie behind their conclusions. Even simple questions like, "Can you tell me more about your thought process on that?" can be effective.

Bring Assumptions to the Surface

Conventional wisdom says assumptions are bad and should be avoided, but conventional wisdom, in this case, is wrong. Assumptions are a natural instrument people need to reduce complexity. The trick is to shine a light on the assumptions we make so we can test the ones that might be contributing to conflict. This starts by examining your own assumptions and acknowledging that they could be wrong. Modeling this behavior will encourage the other party in your conflict to do so as well. This is also a key ground rule of successful facilitation: We will be respectful but ruthless in challenging assumptions in this conversation.

Agree to Disagree

Remember that your goal is not unanimous agreement about everything. Different people in your organization are going to value different things and value things differently. Your focus must remain on shared understanding and shared commitment. Work to create understanding on both sides of a conflict and to ensure that both sides feel they've been heard. This will help everyone to support the final decision.

Focus on Decisions

Difficult conversations done right take time, which will probably frustrate your action-oriented team members, but this means it is critical to reach a clear decision that will generate action. As you approach the root of the conflict, there is a very real danger that people will retreat back to their conflict-averse behavior, leaving the whole conversation open-ended. Be disciplined enough not to let this happen. Push through to decisions and be clear about actions and follow up. Don't rush through the conflict, but don't let the conversation peter out without coming to a decision, either.

Conclusion

Throughout this whitepaper, our goal has been to help you see the connection between risk, opportunity, and strategy. In order to achieve your strategic goals, you must embed risk and opportunity analysis across all levels of your association every day, not just view them as the purview of the management team on your five-year planning cycle. Good risk management helps you understand how various events and developments might impact your strategic goals and forces you to form a plan for how to respond, whether those impacts are positive or negative. Successfully managing your operational and, particularly, strategic risks requires coming to clarity about your risk appetite. Talking through all this can be challenging.

In order to have the kind of good, honest, deep, difficult conversations you require to effectively implement your strategy, your team members need a clear understanding of the role of conflict and the proper way to achieve consensus. Remember, you're not trying to achieve 100 percent agreement, which is impossible on these types of issues anyway. Your goal is to get to the place of shared understanding combined with shared commitment. For that to happen, your staff members need tools to help them uncover the assumptions, data, logic, and emotions that form the foundation of their expressed conclusions. They need training to help them overcome their conflict avoidance and learn how to strive for the type of deep shared understanding and commitment that will allow them to come together in support of the decisions and actions that will advance your mission.

Our goal for you is that your team will come to focus less on fear and acceding to the least common denominator in assessing risk. We want your staff to be effective in talking through risk, risk management, and risk appetite and how those things impact your organizational choices. We hope to encourage them to consider opportunity costs more seriously and weigh them more accurately. Ultimately, our intention is for your association to learn to have better, more honest, more open conversations about your decisions and decision-making processes.

Not sure how to get from where you are to there? We conduct half and full day training workshops for staff teams and volunteer leaders, to help them understand, internalize, and put into practice the concepts we've shared in this whitepaper in their daily work. For more information or to book us for your next staff training or board retreat, contact Elizabeth Weaver Engel at 202.468.3478 or ewengel@getmespark.com, or visit http://getmespark.com/services/training/.

> ***"We spend a lot of time talking about opportunity within nonprofit organizations, but assessing and candidly discussing both the association's culture in terms of risk taking, as well as reviewing the elements of risk associated with the affiliated industry or profession, is an invaluable exercise. As a result of this workshop, our senior leadership team engaged in meaningful and immediately relevant conversations that will shape how we evaluate both existing and new partnerships, programs, and resources."***
>
> Erin Fuller, FASAE, CAE
> President, Coulter

Questions for Reflection

- How do your team members define the term "risk"? Does it vary by department or level on your organization chart?
- How do your volunteer leaders define the term "risk"? Is it different than your staff members' definitions?
- Does your organization see risk as an opportunity or as a threat? Does the answer vary based on whom you ask?
- Is risk management the responsibility of certain people in your association, or is it shared across all levels and departments the organization?
- Has your association identified the risks that really matter? How well are you managing them?
- Do you have a risk appetite statement(s)? How does it relate to your strategic goals?
- How does your understanding of risk and risk appetite inform your debates around your association's strategy?
- What has to go right to achieve your strategy? What could go wrong? How would you know?
- Do your internal conversations about risk tackle the conflicts head on?
- Do you take the time to reach a real, shared understanding in your conflict conversations?
- When your staff makes ground-level decisions, do they even consider risk?

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About Jamie Notter

Jamie Notter is a consultant, speaker, and author who helps organizations find better performance through stronger cultures. Jamie started his career in the field of international conflict resolution, where he spent six years designing and delivering training programs in areas of ethnic conflict (if you get a chance, ask him about the awesome people on the island of Cyprus). Jamie then moved into working with organizations, initially as a diversity trainer and consultant and later leading his private management consulting practice, working extensively with trade associations and professional societies.

Jamie spent five years at Management Solutions Plus, Inc., leading its consulting division and serving as Executive Director for several of its association clients. He now consults and speaks to a variety of industries, and writes on several well-known blogs.

Jamie carries a master's degree in conflict resolution from George Mason University and a Certificate in Organization Development from Georgetown, where he serves as adjunct faculty. An avid writer, he has authored dozens of published articles and three books, including the 2012 hardcover, *Humanize: How People-Centric Organizations Succeed in a Social World,* www.humanizebook.com.

About Elizabeth Weaver Engel

Elizabeth Weaver Engel, M.A., CAE, CEO and Chief Strategist at Spark Consulting LLC, has over 16 years experience in association management. Although her primary focus has been in membership, marketing, and communications, her experience has been wide-ranging, including corporate sponsorship and fundraising, technology planning and implementation, social media and internet strategy, budgeting, volunteer management, publications, and governance.

Spark provides strategic membership and marketing advice and assistance to associations that have the willingness and capacity at both the staff and board levels to ask themselves tough questions and take some risks in service of reaching for big goals. Forget settling for incremental growth by making minor changes to what you're doing—we're going to uncover and solve the root problems that are holding your association back!

Elizabeth combines a focus on asking the right questions and finding and implementing creative solutions with a broad understanding of the association sphere. Throughout her career, she has excelled at increasing membership, revenue, public presence, and member satisfaction while decreasing costs through a focus on the efficient and effective use of data, staff, and technology to serve organizational goals and constituents.

Prior to launching Spark, Elizabeth consulted in online campaigns and marketing and internet and social media strategy for Beaconfire Consulting and in a wide range of subject areas in association management in the not-for-profit consulting practice at RSM McGladrey, Inc. She has also served associations directly in a variety of positions, including Director of Member Services and IT, Director of Marketing and Sponsorship, Vice President of Marketing, and Acting CEO.

Elizabeth is a Certified Association Executive and holds a Master's degree in government and foreign affairs from the University of Virginia.

About Leslie White

Leslie T. White, CPCU, ARM, CIC, CRM, has more than 30 years' experience within the insurance and risk management industry. Since 1995 she has chosen to specialize in serving nonprofit organizations including associations as an insurance and risk management consultant. Her services include risk assessments, insurance evaluations, and designing risk management solutions in such areas as social media, anti-trust, volunteer management, board governance, and daily operations.

Before establishing Croydon Consulting in 2000, Leslie was Director of Risk Management Services for the Nonprofit Risk Management Center, a Washington DC-based, international resource center for community-serving organizations. Prior to becoming a consultant, Leslie worked in the property-casualty industry, completing her corporate career as Underwriting Vice President and Officer for a regional insurance company.

Leslie is also in demand as an author of insurance and risk management issues facing associations and nonprofits. She has written on nonprofit insurance needs, social media risks, risk perceptions, board governance, contract management, business continuity planning, special events, liquor liability, automobile exposures, and many other topics.

Her books include: *Mission Accomplished: A Practical Guide to Risk Management for Nonprofits and the companion Workbook*; *Leaving Nothing to Chance: Achieving Board Accountability Through Risk Management*; *More Than a Matter of Trust: The Risks of Mentoring*; *Managing Special Events: 10 Steps to Safety*; *Doing Good, Doing Well: Managing the Risks of Corporate Volunteer Programs*; and *D&O: What You Need to Know*.

Leslie has earned the professional designations of Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter (CPCU), Associate in Risk Management (ARM), Certified Insurance Counselor (CIC), and Certified Risk Manager (CRM). She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters of Business Administration with a concentration in Management.