

Economic Development Insight

Strategic Doing

By Joan Bethell

There are many individuals, agencies and groups of people in Greene County who are working hard on a project that will benefit Greene County residents. These projects range in scope and impact, and run the gamut from individual donations to a particular cause to larger endeavors like planning a festival. Every one of these activities has a positive impact on our community.

Wouldn't it be wonderful, though, if all of the various activities could be identified and their progress communicated to each of the other active partners? Then we could work more harmoniously, not duplicating any effort, and become more targeted and efficient.

Well, someone thought about that and came up with a solution. Ed Morrison is a member of the staff of the Center for Regional Development at Purdue University and Economic Policy Advisor for the WIRED initiative in North Central Indiana. Ed has developed a new model for economic development: Open Source Economic Development. The model promotes the development of open innovation systems ("clusters") to accelerate regional development.

Ed visited Greene County this week to introduce GCEDC staff and other community partners involved in the HomeTown Competitiveness core team to the Open Source concept and to demonstrate its ability to go beyond strategic planning and to stimulate strategic "doing" (also known as strategic action.)

In Ed Morrison's white paper, *Strategic Doing: The Art & Practice of Strategic Action in Open Networks*, he states, "As we move into the world of networks, we need to find new ways of thinking together... Networks are different. In a world of open networks, strategy becomes the art of guiding purposeful conversations. Effective strategy translates ideas into action quickly, so we can learn what works."

"Strategic doing is a set of principles, practices and disciplines for implementing strategy in a network... It guides strategy across organizational and political boundaries with a discipline to build collaborations quickly. Strategic doing answers four questions:

- What could we do together?
- What should we do together?
- What will we do together?
- How will we learn together?

Sounds simple, yet, it is not easy... it takes practice. Once we learn the discipline of strategic doing... we can move ideas into action quickly."

Strategic doing is also a skill that we can teach to others, once we have learned it ourselves. So, strategic doing is low cost and scalable (and flexible). It can become a convenient framework for igniting and managing creative collaborations... It becomes how we get stuff done when we venture outside the four walls of our own organizations." It starts with agreeing "to behave toward each other in ways that build trust and mutual respect."

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Ed shared the analogy of a person sitting on the beach planning how to navigate across the water to a buoy. That individual can spend a great deal of time planning their course from the beach to the buoy. The problem is that, by the time they have developed their plan and no matter how well thought out it is, it will be defunct. By that time, the conditions, such as the wind, waves, currents and other impacting factors, have changed. Strategic Doing is getting in the boat and starting to paddle, looking up periodically to assess the status and redirect the bearings to ensure that you get to the buoy, because it's all about getting to the target.

Well, having experienced the training in action and the results it produced, the Greene County "trainees" were sold. We decided to try this different approach, so we can learn to deal with complex issues with simple (not simplistic) solutions. As we get comfortable using this method, then we hope to share it with other community partners.

The issues Greene County has to deal with are no less complex than the issues a major city has to deal with. Things like increasing unemployment, poverty, affordable housing, transportation, decreasing revenues, etc. It's just that we have far less resources, so it becomes crucial that we maximize what we have, especially our time, energy and efforts. The Open Source method allows us to "bite off only what we can chew" at any given point in time, and to work together to make significant impacts quickly. I'll share more once we've practiced a bit.

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