

Special Report

Overcoming Resistance to Planning



Make Decisions, Resolve Conflict, Move Forward



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Resistance to Planning

“Schemes lightly made come to nothing but with planning they succeed.”

- Proverbs

Most managers and physician leaders recognize the benefits of developing a long-range plan of action for their group: a unified vision of the future and specific strategies and actions to reach that vision.

With today's fast changing environment, and the significance of needed decisions, planning for the future is especially critical for medical groups. Consider, for example, some of the decisions that face many medical groups today:

Should they add physicians?

Should they expand services?

Does the income distribution method support the strategic goals of the practice?

Is additional space needed to accommodate more services?

How will the group respond to increased competition, a new HMO, or new medical breakthroughs in the way the group provides medical treatment?

No matter what future you foresee, the long-range, strategic planning is essential to identify where you want to go, and how to optimally utilize your resources to get there.



Unfortunately, there is often a reluctance among other members of the group to participate in a strategic planning process. Group leaders often encounter significant resistance from individual physicians who may be too occupied with today's problems to consider tomorrow's.

Why Is Planning Resisted?

In our experience, resistance comes from several sources:

- ***Lack of Interest:*** For many physicians, any process involving “administration” or “business” is about as exciting as reading a life insurance policy is to us. What is curious, however, is that much of a physician's frustration with the group comes from the administrative/organizational side of the practice, and not from the actual practice of medicine.

Thankfully, more and more physicians are realizing that they have made a significant investment in time, money and reputation with the group, and that strategic, long-range planning is needed to optimize the payback of this investment.

- ***Conflict Avoidance:*** Many physicians want to avoid any possible form of visible conflict among the group members. They believe that “lack of recognition” equals “lack of existence.” Many times this conflict is simply the result of a lack of communication about goals, a situation often relieved by effective planning.
- ***Misunderstanding of Process and Benefits:*** Physicians cherish their time, and need to feel the investment in planning is worth the pay-off. It is imperative for them to understand why planning is necessary, that the process is well-thought, efficient and effective, and the benefits to be obtained from the planning effort.
- ***Is There Really A Need?:*** Physicians often do not realize the diversity of goals among the members of the practice, or they pretend that they do not exist. They understand their goals and desires, and assume that others feel the same or approximately the same way. In addition, they may not see that some goals are mutually exclusive, and that the group must wrestle with these issues if they are to survive and thrive in the future.



Overcoming Resistance

Typically, overcoming physician resistance to strategic planning involves a three-prong approach: (1) Education; (2) Champions; (3) Recognition of Need.

It is up to the physician leadership and management to **educate** the physicians about the need for, process of and benefits from strategic planning. This can be done through sending them articles about strategic planning, discussing the concept at group meetings, or having the physicians discuss the process with physician peers at other groups who have gone through such a process.

All organizations use **champions** to lead the organization down needed paths. The group's leadership should recruit, educate, and obtain "buy-in" from a smaller number of the group's physicians, and have them work to influence the rest of the group.

You would think that everyone in the group would recognize the need for planning, especially with a large number of unresolved issues that most groups face. Amazingly, this is typically not the case. To help your physicians recognize the need for planning, Latham Consulting Group has developed a special *Planning Needs Survey* that you can administer to your physicians. The survey can be completed by the physicians and compiled by you. The results can then be used by the group to analyze its planning needs.

Of course, these actions require time and effort from everyone in the practice. But the rewards are worth it: better resource utilization, reduced conflict, improved morale, and a common vision of the future

As you might expect, our knowledge in this area is based on the fact that Latham Consulting Group has provided **Strategic Planning Facilitation Services** to many medical groups. If we can provide assistance or answer any questions you might have, please contact us at 704/365-8889.