

Managing Under Tough Circumstances: Challenges, Best Practices and Next Steps

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**Marty Kaplan, Ph.D.
Avista Consulting Group**

Presentation Overview

- Inquiry
- Challenges
- Competencies
- Best practices
- Supporting each other

Interview Questions

- What are the key challenges you're currently facing in your role?
- What are the most critical competencies necessary for you to successfully address these challenges? What are some best practices?
- What keeps you up at night?

The Challenges

- This economic “storm”
- Market volatility
- The budget crisis
- Being underfunded
- Unfunded growth
- Juggling disparate responsibilities - shrinking budgets, growing facilities

The Challenges (cont'd)

- Determining actual revenues
- Making plans and decisions with insufficient information
- Complexities associated with managing under “these conditions” in a shared governance environment
- Authority not matching our level of responsibility

The Challenges (cont'd)

- Not having sufficient talent at all levels to deal with the volume and complexity of the work
- The sheer volume of work
- The sheer complexity of the work
- Being the “bad guy” and having to say “no” a lot
- Not knowing what I need to know to do what I need to do

The Challenges (cont'd)

- Figuring out ways to meet growing demand with diminishing resources
- Convincing our Presidents and Boards that we're really, really going to need to cut deeply

What challenges have I missed?

- Having to deal with fixed labor contracts that were negotiated under different circumstances
- Burdensome regulations
- Our commitment to shared governance, our unions and getting through the fiscal crisis we're now in are in conflict with each other
- The belief held by our Board of Trustees that we need to be everything to everyone
- We're unable to get all the support we need from the Chancellor's office (because it's a small office)
- A widely shared sense of "entitlement" by our stakeholders that powerfully impacts their expectations

Competencies and Best Practices

- Technical
- Planning
- People
- Systems
- Learning
- Personal Mastery

Technical Competencies

- Strong fiscal and analytic skills
- Deep knowledge of funds and accountabilities
- Ability to think critically about information you're presented with
- Ability to communicate complex financial information in ways that people can understand
- Closely watching the money and being financially conservative
- Being straight with the numbers and not making them look any better than they are

Planning Competencies

- The ability to develop scenarios that smooth things out over a 3 year time-frame versus one year

People Competencies

- Establishing strong, positive, high trust relationships with key stakeholders
- Bringing divergent stakeholders into consensus
- Helping people get what they need given the constraints and guidelines (not saying “no,” but “yes, but...”)
- Being honest, direct and transparent; letting people know what’s going on
- Responding quickly to opportunities
- Being tenacious, but not acting like a bull in a china shop
- Selecting good people and letting them do their jobs
- Building teamwork and camaraderie
- Mentoring people to be leaders in their areas

People Competencies

- Dealing competently with all the blaming that's going on throughout the system and modeling appropriate behavior

“Perhaps the most difficult behavior to overcome is a tendency to assign blame the minute something goes wrong. This very human propensity needs to be replaced with something that doesn’t come naturally to most people: a dispassionate analysis of how all parties contributed to a problematic situation and what each can do to improve it”

Harvard Business Review

Systems Competencies

- Seeing the “big picture” to avoid being shortsighted
- Seeking greater understanding of how things operate, and are inter-related, at the national, state and local levels
- Ability to work with faculty and student interests in mind
- Understanding the academic side of the house and becoming partners with them
- Understanding politics but not getting “caught up” in them
- Knowing your own biases but understanding others perspectives...hearing other constituent groups even though you don’t like what you’re hearing

*“We cannot live only for ourselves alone.
A thousand fibers connect us with each
other; and along these fibers our actions
run as causes, and they come back to us
as effects.”*

Herman Melville

Learning Competencies

- Willingness, desire and ability to master a very steep learning curve, e.g. state funding, legislations, advocacy, etc.
- An openness to new ideas and ways of thinking about things; the ability to “think outside the box”
- A willingness to admit you don’t have all the answers

“Knowledge constantly makes itself obsolete, with the result that today’s advanced knowledge is tomorrow’s ignorance”

Peter Drucker

Personal Mastery

- Patience
- Not “losing it”
- Being thick-skinned; not taking things personally
- Willingness to speak the truth, be direct with people and raise tough issues
- A positive and optimistic outlook
- Flexibility and willingness to adapt/change
- A strong personal vision and guiding set of principles
- Knowing and trusting your gut
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity
- Appropriate use of humor
- Sustaining oneself over time

What competencies and best practices have I missed?

- The ability to synthesize things for people in memorable, bite-size chunks
- The capacity for self-reflection; the ability to become consistently aware of our own thinking
- The ability to persuade people when you're under a tremendous amount of pressure; requires understanding people who have equally strong and compelling goals
- Being perceived as credible when you're not able to give people the hard data they've come to expect from you; selling "soft" answers and not losing your credibility
- Maintaining contact with students as a way to stay grounded in the social mission of the college
- Possessing, and acting on, a strong sense of urgency
- Having the skills to help reduce anxiety and fear for others

Competencies and best practices I missed (cont'd)

- Not letting strong self-interests dominate decision-making
- Celebrating achievements (combining food and recognition works well in our environment); recognize “stars of the week” at weekly staff meetings
- Not watering down solutions in order to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders with divergent interests
- Managing competing, complex priorities, e.g. student centered, fiscal stability
- During these times, recognizing that fiscal stability is not a sign of stability
- As a manager empowering others...by being clear about what you expect from them, letting them know that you're committed to their success, and getting out of their way and letting them do their job
- Helping people quickly move through the stages of grief, e.g. anger, denial, etc. to acceptance and moving on

What keeps you up at night?

- Not knowing what's going to happen
- The unknown
- What I know I don't know
- What I don't know I don't know
- The \$, the lack of \$, not knowing the impact of the budget

UNCERTAINTY

What's your “experience” of uncertainty?

- *Your feelings*
- *Your thoughts*

“The true test of character is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don’t know what to do.”

John Holtz

“It is said that what the caterpillar calls the end of the world the master calls the butterfly.”

Zen saying

“Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not yet understood.”

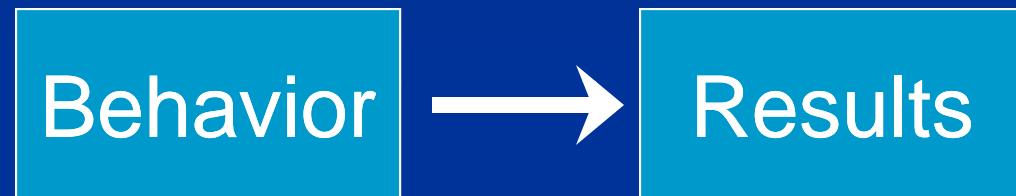
Henry Miller

Managing Uncertainty from the Inside-Out

Results

what's achieved

Managing Uncertainty from the Inside-Out



actions we take

what's achieved

Managing Uncertainty from the Inside-Out



attitudes, beliefs,
assumptions

actions we take

what's achieved

Common Mindsets about Uncertainty



- A sign of weakness
- An admission of fault
- An indicator of incompetence
- An expression of ignorance, stupidity
- A “sin” to be covered up
- Can’t act without full information
- A call to arms

Common Responses to Uncertainty



- Fight or flight
- Oversimplify it
- Conceal it
- Distort it
- Ignore it
- Go on the attack and find someone to blame
- Protect self against attack from others
- Get overwhelmed; give up; surrender
- Shut down and isolate self

Common Results



- Inaction, immobilization
- Lack of communication
- Low trust, high fear within and between groups
- In-fighting and competition
- “Every man for himself”

The Good News: Mindsets Can Change

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitudes in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

- Victor Frankl

The Not-So-Good News: But Only If We Want To

“Faced with the choice between changing one’s mind and proving that there is no need to do so, almost everybody gets busy on the proof.”

- John Kenneth Galbraith

Best Practice Mindsets about Uncertainty



- It's inevitable in an increasingly changing, turbulent, complex and interdependent world
- I'm not a failure if I don't know everything
- Others aren't failures if they don't know everything
- Control is an illusion; I can only control myself
- The future can't be predicted, only invented
- Embedded in this uncertainty is opportunity
- I need to learn how to manage the strong emotions evoked in me by the experience of uncertainty

Best Practice Responses to Uncertainty



- Notice your default mindset about uncertainty
- Say what you know and what you don't know
- Communicate consistently and honestly about economic realities
- Take responsibility for your part and avoid blaming others
- Focus on your vision and use it as a source of inspiration and a touchstone that grounds you when you're unsettled and unsure of what to do next
- Re-connect and re-commit to your values

Best Practice Responses to Uncertainty



- Sharpen your capacity to accurately sense what's happening in the environment and to adapt rapidly to those changed circumstances
- Build strong, trusting partnerships with key stakeholder groups to enable rapid response
- Create helpful structures to traverse difficult, awkward or uncertain situations, e.g. "framing" meetings
- Plan for alternative futures; scenario planning
- Build teamwork

Best Practice Results



- Collaboration and partnership
- Conflict and disagreement used to build new understandings
- Knowledge gets generated to solve thorny, complex problems
- “Win-win”

Changing Mindsets

- Notice your mindset and its consequences
- Take a few deep breaths
- Disengage from the mindset
- Make a choice about your mindset and behavior
- Re-engage

Mindsets about Differences

- I see the whole picture. I have all the “facts” I need.
- They see the same picture as I do (though probably not as clearly).
- There is a right way of interpreting the “facts,” differing interpretations indicate that someone is wrong
- My role, and the way I can best help them, is to get them to acknowledge the validity of my “picture.”
- If I describe my “picture” well enough and/or forcefully enough, I’ll get them to “see the light” and agree.
- Given the above, if they choose to do something other than what I am suggesting, they must be crazy, stupid, or evil.
- The brain is a filtering and pattern-recognizing device. Two parties in the same situation will invariably select and focus on different facts/data.
- A complex fact pattern can generally be interpreted in several valid ways. I may have something to learn from them.
- People tend to do a.) what is in their best interest, and b.) what seems justified to them. If they see the situation differently than I do, each of us is likely to be missing something.
- In order to get to a good solution, I need to be able to see their “picture.” It pays for me to get into their shoes and understand their perceptions and what shapes them. If I can help us each do this, we can jointly come to a more optimal solution.

Mindsets about Complexity

- The best way to deal with a complex and controversial issue is to act with speed, and perhaps stealth, to avoid counter-productive debate
- I can be most helpful if I first figure out what a good answer is and then try to get others on board with it
- The best way to solve a complex problem is to avoid pointless debate and analysis paralysis and to focus on possible solutions.
- Involving multiple parties in problem solving or decision making is a recipe for gridlock.
- To get resolution on a complex issue, everyone needs to agree with the solution.
- Spending time up front to build alignment will save time later by reducing subsequent conflict and maximizing the odds of successful implementation.
- I can be most helpful by facilitating a process that efficiently leverages the involvement of key parties.
- Without alignment around the nature of a problem and its causes, people will have a difficult time agreeing on the best solution.
- Involving multiple parties in problem solving or decision making is critical. The manner in which they are involved determines the efficiency of the process and the quality of the outcome.
- People are often willing and able to support a decision they disagree with if they feel that they have been heard and that their views have been considered.

Ways We Can Support Each Other

- Our mentoring program; mentoring others; “adopting” a new CBO
- We (ACBO) should be advocating for change at the state level; we need to contact legislators to get their support and create change
- We should create a system-wide position on financial/economic conditions
- We should increase the frequency of useful communication to us about the budget situation; we should expand on Erik’s emails
- We should distribute a regional directory with contact information
- We should agree to act and think in the best interests of the whole community college system; we should “speak with one voice”
- We need to be mindful of changing legislation and how it impacts the system
- We should establish a teleconference where we share emerging best practices; best practices should be communicated via email
- We should create more forums where we come together and form problem-solving work groups; more networking is better during these times, both formal and informal

Ways We Can Support Each Other (cont'd)

- Consider monthly regional meetings or conference calls
- We should consider creating a blog or chat room that we can go to (maybe on ACBO's website) where best practices (and perhaps worst practices, too) can be shared
- Share “sound bites” we can use when faced with difficult situations
- We need to trust each other
- Despite the pressure we might feel, to not turn against each other (campus against campus)
- We need to reach out when we notice that someone needs help, and we need to allow others to help us, in turn, when we need it
- We need to be able to vent our frustrations with each other as well as bounce ideas off each other.
- Do kind things, e.g. send a colleague a hand-written note, invite a colleague to lunch
- Develop empathy for others

Management of Self

Diet

- Eat a healthy breakfast
- Maintain a low fat, low sugar diet
- Restrict alcohol intake

Rest

- Arrange a quiet time each day
- Engage in relaxation before bed
- Get a good night's sleep

Exercise

- Engage in 20 minutes of aerobic exercise at least 3 times a week
- Participate in a game or sport on a regular basis
- Walk as much as possible

Recharging

- Schedule regular time with friends or family members
- Find quiet time
- Establish personal and professional goals
- Assess accomplishments from time to time

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*Marty Kaplan, Ph.D.
Avista Consulting Group
510.339-3216
martykaplan@earthlink.net*