ADK Futures Case Study

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An illustration of Future Mapping, a structured, participative scenario planning process
Geography, Context, Scope

• Scope: Future of the Adirondack Park, 25 yr strategy
  – Environmental protection, economic development, community vitality, regulation, education, healthcare...all inclusive

• Geography: The Adirondack Park (est. 1890’s), 6 million acres of Northern Forest in New York
  – 50:50 public:private land
  – 100+ towns and school districts
  – 130,000 residents, millions of visitors
  – <6hr drive from all the Northeast corridor cities

• Context: No existing strategy, lots of regulations and conflicts, many leaders, no one in charge
  – Highly polarized, described as “preferring to fight rather than win”
Who was Involved?

• The ADK Common Ground Alliance Core Team was our client
  – A 7yr old informal collection of area leaders of various types: elected, NGOs, regulators, foundations, concerned citizens
  – Main activity was an annual open forum
• ~150 interviews for input to the ‘kit’
• 515+ participants in 14 workshops, 2 formats, 18 months
  – Effort to move around to make it easy for people to come
  – 2 day invitational, w/a “Noah’s ark” group of people
  – ½ day format, some open public, some closed groups eg, college class, a youth event, NGO enviro boards
• 20+ talks and 8 specific follow-up projects with key organizations
• Dave & Jim, with help from Kathy, created and ran the workshops pro bono
Purpose, Anticipated Outcome

• Purpose: To improve the regional conversation
• Informally linked to a State-run regional economic development planning competition running at the same time
  – This effort was complementary, for a sub-region
  – The scenarios were context for the regional economic plan
• Method: Future Mapping, writing an intentionally incomplete scenario building kit and holding repetitive scenario building workshops in various formats
  – Arose from original work at AD Little in the 1970s-80s for IBM and Citibank, not rooted in Shell history
• Initial intent was to run one workshop
Actual Outcomes

• 14 workshops, surprisingly broad agreement on vision and priorities
• First pass at a roadmap to achieving the vision
• Completely changed the regional conversation
• Hundreds of aligned efforts are underway by all sorts of people – it is the de facto direction
• Task forces started on important or especially difficult topics – constitutional amendment, regional venture funding
• Major economic development grant wins
• Adapted by state government as its roadmap for the region
• Journal paper*
• None of this was planned at the outset

We Write Scenario Building Kits

Based on 150 Interviews plus various books, articles and research

6 Endstates

F. ADK State Forest
E. Post Big-Gov’t
D. ADK County
C. Sustainable
B. A Usable Park
A. Wild Park

Park Loses Battle to 3 Key Invasive Species

Emerald ash borer, Asian Long Horn Beetle, and Wooly Algelid are establish in the central Adirondacks. The result is large areas with many dead trees which presents a serious fire risk but also offers a potential source of biomass. A debate is on about whether to clear the deadwood in the Forest Preserve area.

2020 ±

120 Events

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Workshop Task 1: Capturing Current Expectations (mental models)

- **Goals:** Become familiar with the event set
  Understand the group’s current expectations
  Discover how your thinking aligns with others

- On each event, vote whether you *personally* think the event is
  highly likely, highly unlikely or uncertain

- **Process:** read the event, agree on the central idea, then vote using
  hand signals, record the vote

- Don’t try to convince your teammates but offer context or
  knowledge that you have – teachable moments
  – You have an average of one minute per event

- Result presented to the group at the end of the day
  – Typically makes a group uncomfortable with how they think as a
    group. Individuals privately calibrate their ideas versus the group.
  – Reveals the need to learn, allows for unlearning, letting go of
    previously successful ideas, making room for new concepts
Mapping the Scenarios

- Build paths of events to each endstate
- The most interesting events are:
  - forks in the road or
  - common to many or
  - unique to one

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Synthesis Task: ADK Futures Implementation Over Time

A: Forest Preserve is Solid
B: starts high, improves, then tapers off
C: will have ups and downs due to need for behavior changes
D: will grow slowly early, then take hold
E: slow fade as we act more regionally
Work Behind the Scenes

• What was more or less effective and why, innovations, surprises?
  – Surprise was that ‘most desirable’ was also ‘most attainable’ .....never seen this before
  – ½ day sessions enabled many more people and groups to participate
  – Intentionally incomplete kits made people think more holistically

• Observations related to mental models
  – Deriving ‘mental models’ built from expectations about events makes it an object of discussion and reflection
    • Enable individuals to privately observe their ‘fit’ with their group
  – Events allow people to see how their effort fits a bigger pattern, is connected to a bigger effort
  – Groups want to know how they compare to other groups

• In addition to writing and running the workshops and presenting results ...
  – 5 follow up strategy projects with key groups
  – We picked up 2 difficult follow up projects
  – Wrote software to (1)author the event set and (2)handle ranking data and (3)track which (meeting w/real time voting) events get associated with which endstates (4) compare results across workshops and (5)show how real news tracks to the events.
Lessons Learned

• A lot can be accomplished with a holistic, shared vision/mental model – even if you don’t control any of the resources. Alignment across groups brings comfort to politicians.

• Interview widely to write the kit
  – Keep going until you hear nothing new…..
    • Leaders, heretics, laggards, people who work at intersections
  – If in doubt, keep interviewing

• Endstates must connect to how people think, as revealed in the interviews
  – Often vectors that do not fit a 2x2 matrix model

• Encourage workshop attendees to edit, add, and delete events, but reuse the endstate framework as often as possible
  – Enable groups to see how they compare to others