Lecture 17: Strategic Conversations

Welcome back to the course title strategic.

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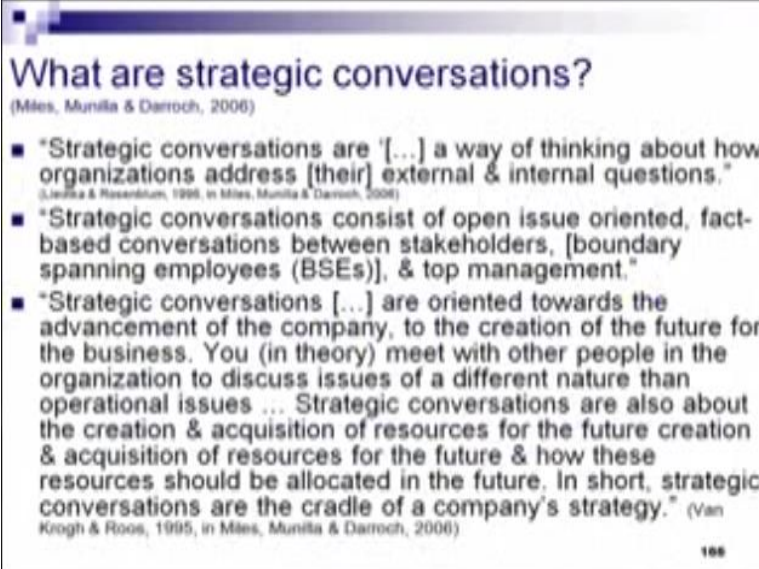

Communication for sustainable development my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and today's topic is.

The role of strategic communication with stakeholders in sustainable development and this is from a paper by Meijer Myunial Draouch which primarily describes how strategic communication with stakeholders helps organizations and I am going to take whatever they have said and apply that to the context of social development of sustainable development not only social development but sustainable social development okay, so the topic for this discussion is going to be strategic communications sorry strategic conversations. Strategic conversations are.

A way of thinking about how organizations address their external and internal questions they are a way of finding out how communities here this definition talks about organizations we apply it to the context of the community how communities address their external and internal questions how communities talk about the problems that matter to them externally and internally what are the external influences on the community how do they address them and what are the internal problems and how are these related.

Strategic conversations consist of open issue oriented fact-based conversations between stakeholders boundary spanning employees and top management boundary spanning employees in the context of organizations are the people who are who play the role of linking the internal environment to the external environment of an organization they are the people who are in the context of community they are the people within the community who connect the community to the outside world.

So they are the they are the boundary spanners we would not call them boundary spanning employees when we talk about communities we will call them the boundary spanners boundary spanning people for lack of a better world so you know they are they form the liaison between

the internal and external environments of a community and the top management here in the context of community the stakeholders would become the community itself the top management would be the people who are going to implement these development efforts in the community and the boundary spanners would be the people within the community that are going to facilitate that are going to connect with the people who are going to implement these efforts with the stakeholders.

So they are the liaisons and strategic conversations in the context of the community would be the conversations that happen between these three sets of people of open issue oriented where issues are discussed in an open you know in a way where issues are discussed in a fact-based manner between these three groups of people strategic conversations are oriented towards the advancement of the company to the creation of the future of the business so you know they are directed towards the towards the advancement towards the development of the community to the creation of the of future or they are connected with they are oriented towards the development of the community for the benefit of the community you meet with other people in the business.

You meet with other people in the organization to discuss issues of a different nature than operational issue strategic conversations are also about the creation and acquisition of resources for the future and how these resources should be allocated in the future, so when we talk about communities we are talking about strategic conversations being about how what resources are needed how they can be collected how they can be used or how they can be created and how they can be used to improve the quality of life of the people in the community then in short strategic conversations are the cradle of the company's strategy or a community strategy.

How do strategic conversations help the first way or you know they helped by bridging critical gaps and perceptions through issue-oriented fact-based open conflict between top management who are responsible for developing intended strategies and strategic vision for the organization or community the boundary spanners who tend to create emergence strategies and relevant stakeholders.

So wherever there are two sets of people wherever there are people in the community with or people from different backgrounds conflict is bound to occur conflict is result of differences in opinion there will be differences in opinion as to which policy should be implemented and when and where and who will be affected by it will benefit from it who may be negatively affected by it all of these things will come into play.

So strategic conversations help bridge these gaps in perceptions regarding what means what to whom a policy may mean one thing to the to the person designing the policy it may mean something different to the person implementing the policy it may mean something totally different to the beneficiary of the policy and strategic communications help bridge these gaps in and through dialogue.

So between the affected parties between the creators of policies the implementers of the policies the liaisons between community and policy makers and implementers and the affected parties strategic conversations are dynamic and recursive in nature resulting in an increase in both the quality and quantity of information and technology transfers between stakeholders of the firm or the community thereby contributing to the formulation of the strategy of the firm and it is implementation.

So they are dynamic they initiate or they result in the feedback loops that help in increasing the quality and quantity of information that is exchanged between the implementers the policymakers and the policy user sand beneficiaries and that in turn helps the technology transfer or that helps in transferring the techniques for development the goals of development the processes of development from the people who have the expertise to the people who can use the expertise the feedback loops again we talked about the participatory model it is not be one way transfer it is the participatory model like we discussed in some earlier lectures and strategic conversations help in this smooth transfer of technology and development of Technology appropriate for a particular community.

Okay then different strategic communication strategies for example face-to-face virtual phone by phone etc… you know mass communication strategies conversation strategies would not be mass
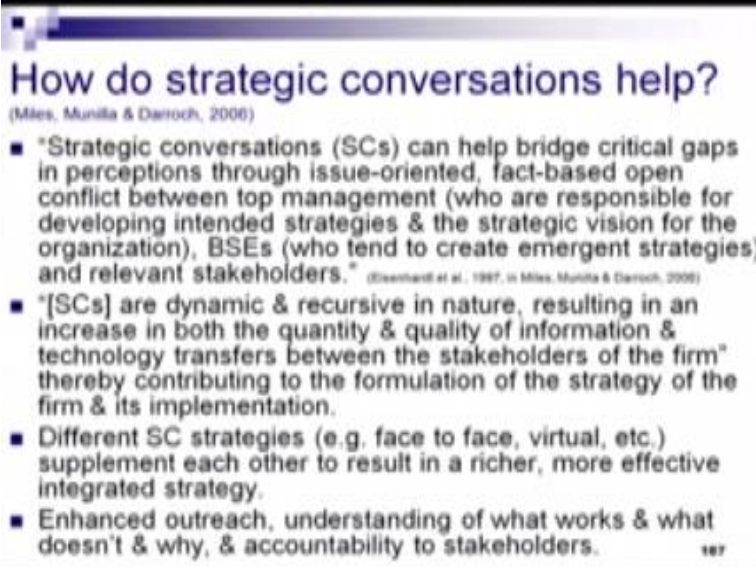
communication but they could be you could be talking to people on the phone there could be a helpline number for agricultural problems there could be a helpline number for health problems there could be a helpline number where you could call in and just talking to people just getting in touch with them finding out what they could need what they may need what they actually need how they can use what we are what we have will help us give or will help the implementers design ways and methods in wish to help the community.

So this supplement each other to result in a richer more effective integrated strategy and this happens only in and through smart communication it is not just random rapo building it is actually going in and finding out what is required so it could be needs assessment it could be capacity building it could be whole bunch of things starts with sensitivity to the environment just listening feeling thinking reflection enhanced outreach strategic conversations also helped with enhanced outreach understanding of what works and what does not and why and the accountability to stakeholders.

When we talk to people when we ask them what they want they start expecting things okay, so when the when the development efforts are participatory then people start expecting things from the people who are actually going to put in those efforts and that is fair enough there is time there is effort there is energy involved and in community oriented cultures there are emotions that are involved you actually go and bond with the people concerned okay.

So these strategies then help with the accountability to stakeholders also.

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How do strategic conversations help?
(Miles, Munilla & Darroch, 2006)

- "Strategic conversations (SCs) can help bridge critical gaps in perceptions through issue-oriented, fact-based open conflict between top management (who are responsible for developing intended strategies & the strategic vision for the organization), BSEs (who tend to create emergent strategies) and relevant stakeholders." (Eisenhardt et al., 1997, in Miles, Munilla & Darroch, 2006)
- "[SCs] are dynamic & recursive in nature, resulting in an increase in both the quantity & quality of information & technology transfers between the stakeholders of the firm" thereby contributing to the formulation of the strategy of the firm & its implementation.
- Different SC strategies (e.g. face to face, virtual, etc.) supplement each other to result in a richer, more effective integrated strategy.
- Enhanced outreach, understanding of what works & what doesn't & why, & accountability to stakeholders.

And they also help develop an understanding of what works and what does not and, and why and I will share an example of an event that I was a part of in which we used the strategic conversation strategy to develop some development efforts.

The role of strategic conversations in closing gaps strategic conversations help close the performance capability gap performance or, and capability gap is the gap between the top managements perception of the firms CSR current performance and its capabilities the BSEs perception of the firms CSR current performance and its capabilities and stakeholders perception of the firms CSR performance and its capability sound very compliments, complicated, but what it really says what, what this the section really talks about it about is that there is a gap in the perception regarding what the policymakers and implementers can do in the field.

And how and why and that is a gap that is exposed and in some ways plugged by the strategic conversations. So what do they claim to know performance and capability.

What, what do they come with they say, okay we are the we are so and so we have done this in this place we have done this in this place and then they come and they actually do what is required to be done in a community. So everybody is perceptions are more or less you know strategic conversations help align the perceptions of the different people involved in sustainable development efforts and processes, okay.

The futures gap the gap between the top managements perception of the future the firms role in that future the BSE is perception of the future and the firms role in that future and the stakeholders perception of the future and the firms role in that future, so how do we perceive our futures and what do we expect from the people who can contribute to that future the community perceives its future in a certain way, okay.

And the community starts expecting things from the people who claim to help the community now these people could be the politicians, they could be the social workers, they could be the government, they could be the local administration, they could be people, they could be academics who go in for one project second project third project extra. So we start perceiving

our future association with wherever we come in contact with, excuse me, in a certain way and strategic conversations help close this gap.

They help people the different people involved in the process align their perceptions about the future in a manner that they all understand what is going on, okay. So the implementers of the policy may have a certain vision for the future of the community they may have some idea and the, the policy the people who make the policy have some idea, the liaisons between the internal and external environments of the community have some idea, the people the community itself has some idea about its own future.

And these different perceptions are aligned through strategic conversations through smart conversations through asking the right questions to the right people at the right time and interpreting the responses that we get from the community in the context of what we understand about the community and how do we develop that understanding of the community by being a part of the community by checking with the community, by through this the feedback loops that we establish in our conversations in our connection with the community.

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Goal of strategic conversations, the goal of strategic conversations is to facilitate the flow of tacit knowledge and the transfer of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge in and around an organization or a community. So we are again talking about experts but it is not only that it is also to enhance participation to know what needs to be transferred to get that and to transfer it in a manner that it will be acceptable by the community.

Some steps of effective strategic conversations, effective strategic conversations take place through various steps, the first step here is questioning and understanding the mental models and concerns of top management BSEs and relevant stakeholders. The first step is finding out where we are, what are we doing, okay so that is the first step questioning and understanding the mental models and concerns of the as far as the community is concerned this would be the policymakers the liaison between the community and the policymakers and implementers and the community itself.

And the outcome of this step would be a rich understanding of the preferred strategic intent of the various participants, what do we want at the end of these efforts? We all need to be on the same page regarding that, what is it that we are going towards what are we what do we want to sustain and why, okay so that question is answered. Sharing the second step after we have understood what we all want then we want to share tacit knowledge among and between the organizational and stakeholder groups.

So once we know what is required then we take that knowledge that information and we transfer it to the people who can use it among the people who have it and the people who can use it, okay.

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Steps of effective strategic conversations
(Miles, Munilla & Darroch, 2006)

Step	Outcomes
1. Questioning & understanding the mental models & concerns of top management, BSEs, & relevant stakeholders	A richer understanding of the preferred strategic intent of the various participants.
2. Sharing tacit knowledge among & between organizational & stakeholder groups	Enhancing the organization's knowledge base, creating a shared understanding of the firm's history, capabilities, performance & future
3. Transforming relevant tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge	Codifying the firm's knowledge base
4. Using this shared explicit knowledge to evaluate intended & emergent strategies in the process of strategic rationalization	A forced 'reality check', to determine whether there really is a 'shared understanding of the firm's history, capabilities, performance & future
5. Strategy formation	Enhanced competitive standing as an outcome of more informed & relevant strategy making

And that is the step and how do we do it the final outcome is enhancing the organizations knowledge-based so we find out from the community what they want, when we go back and we get it, if we can we try our best to gather that information enhance our knowledge base creating a shared understanding of the firms history in this case the history of how we have developed policies how we have worked on the development efforts and then we create a shared understanding of what we can and cannot do, what we have and have not been able to do in the past capabilities, performance and future

So this is what we have this is what we need this is what we can give to the community this is how we can sustain it in the future, so we share the tacit knowledge. Then the third step is transforming relevant tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, so what we know is then transferred into what we show explicit knowledge is the knowledge that is expressed in various ways in an through performance in and through, through decision-making extra. Codifying the

firms knowledge base, so we decide what we want to show what we want to express and how and that is the, the final outcome. After we have done that using the shared explicit knowledge to evaluate intended and emergent strategies in the process of strategic rationalization we know what goal we are moving towards, we know what we want at the end of it so we share this explicit knowledge we want to achieve X this is the knowledge we have to achieve X this is how we are going to use that knowledge and then we actually in the fourth step we start using the shared explicit knowledge to evaluate intended and emergent strategies in the process of strategic rationalization.

When we want to use this knowledge how are we going to go ahead and use it and how will it affect the different stages of the work that we are going to do in the community, in the context of the organization it would be strategy in the context of the community it would be the social development efforts. And those are going to be affected by a whole bunch of things that we cannot predict. So the way this strategic development happens in all our strategic efforts happen in, in the developing areas in the socially vulnerable area is very, very different from the way they happen in the organizations.

And the outcome would be a forced reality check we go in with one idea we come out with another plans are the first things to crash in any real so especially social development effort, we go in with one plan and the community throws another googly at us, I am a cricket fan so googly is a ball that whose direction you cannot predict so it comes and you know you do not know which way the ball is going to swing and which way is going to bounce and everything and it is a forced reality check to determine whether there really is a shared understanding of the forms history capabilities performance and future.

So when we go and actually implement what we have planned that is when it hits us and that is when the gaps regarding or the gaps in our understanding of what we want from our efforts are exposed okay. So we and that happens only when we actually go out and do what we set out to do.

So we go and tell people, we ask people what do you want, come back evaluate ourselves and we say okay this is what we will tell people when we go back and tell people that this is how we can help you, this is what we will do for you, we actually start doing it, then they say no, this is not what we wanted. The actual intended result was something totally different, so there could be a problem with the communication and then further alignment the feedback loop is established at this point.

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Steps of effective strategic conversations
(Miles, Munilla & Darroch, 2006)

Step	Outcomes
1. Questioning & understanding the mental models & concerns of top management, BSEs, & relevant stakeholders	A richer understanding of the preferred strategic intent of the various participants.
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5. Strategy formation	Enhanced competitive standing as an outcome of more informed & relevant strategy making

The gaps are exposed and then the strategy for mission takes place we know where we can expect the problems to start we realize where we can see gaps, we realize where things are going to not happen the way we planned that they would happen and that is when the strategy formation start. So we say, okay these are the areas where we will have to be careful, this is how we will communicate our interests, our capabilities, our visions for the future, and that strategy formation then leads to enhanced competitive standing as an outcome of more informed and relevant strategy making in the context of the community, it is going to be, you know an enhanced competitive and enhanced understanding of or an enhanced development or a richer formulation of a more informed and relevant strategy making effort.

So we are now better prepared for the unexpected events, we use a term contingency planning I think that is an oxymoron because by definition contingencies are unexpected events, so we cannot plan for unexpected events, we can only be prepared for unexpected events. And that is what happens when we get the feedback from the environment, from the community we become better prepared to face these questions.

And we know where in what stage, at what stage of our efforts we can expect what kinds of questions the exact questions will reveal themselves at the proper time, but we get a fair enough idea of the kinds of problems the kinds of gaps that are likely to be exposed that are likely to surface and we are better prepared to deal with them and succeed in our ultimate efforts to help the community and that is these are.

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Steps of effective strategic conversations
(Miles, Munilla & Darroch, 2006)

Step	Outcomes
1. Questioning & understanding the mental models & concerns of top management, BSEs, & relevant stakeholders	A richer understanding of the preferred strategic intent of the various participants.
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Some of the steps that have been proposed okay.

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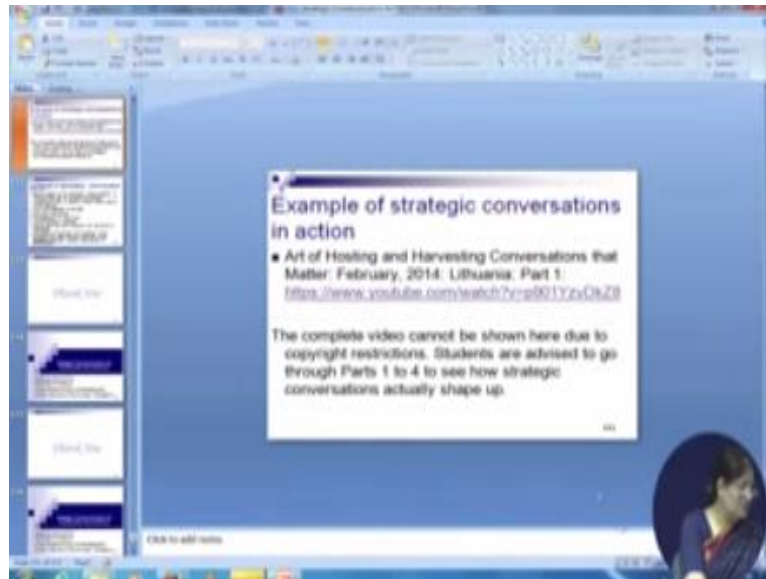

Example of strategic conversations in action

- Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter: February, 2014: Lithuania: Part 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p901YzvDkZ8

The complete video cannot be shown here due to copyright restrictions. Students are advised to go through Parts 1 to 4 to see how strategic conversations actually shape up.

At this point I would like to show you, I cannot show you the whole video because of copyright restrictions, but I can definitely take you to the video and this video is in four parts. So please watch it on your own it is actually, you know it is a very interesting exercise that demonstrates the art of hosting and harvesting conversations that matter there was a workshop in Lithuania in February 2004 and, you know just have the subtitles on YouTube and this is shown there as to how people physically get together and do it and after this I will share an example of an activity.

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That I was a part of many years ago there we used strategic conversations as a method of development efforts.

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And only I did not know about the term strategic conversations at that point okay. So this is the video.

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And this is summary. Many years ago I am a part of a group or a team that worked on, you know we tried to evaluate the kinds of efforts that would be required in a particular development setting. And what we did was we got all the stakeholders involved, we got all the stakeholders to come to a particular, to come to our center and we all, we made a list of the questions we would ask them, and they had these discussions and little focus groups. And then they had these discussions, they came out with outcomes, the outcomes were compiled and then they were put together.

And then we went through the discussions in many cases the discussions were in the regional language which many of us did not understand. So these discussions were put together and we went through these discussions and we summarized the results of these discussions. And then we came up with what we really wanted to go in and do with these people. So that is how this strategic conversation technique can really help you, we made a list of questions, but he gave the discussion leaders the freedom to take the discussion in a way that would not take them with, you know to keep the discussion somewhat on track and still in and through rapo building, regular discussions, conversations just get what we wanted out of the conversation.

And that was a very enriching experience and I wish I could give you more details but I am not at liberty to do so but then you can watch these four videos.

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And those four videos will give you a very nice idea of how these conversations really help, you know come to a strategic plan for sustainable development. So that is where we will stop the discussion today, and we will continue from here in the next lecture, thank you very much for listening.