

Action Plans

Contents

Introduction

Importance of Action Plans

How to develop an Action Plan

Summary

Introduction

Planning is anticipatory decision making. It is a process in which an enterprise decides what to do and how to do it before any action is required. It is also a design for a desired future and how to make it a reality. Therefore planning has been recognized from the very beginning as an important element in management process.

An enterprise develops strategies for its survival as well as for its success. A strategy in simple terms is a "unified, comprehensive and integrated plan designed to assure that the basic objectives of the enterprise is achieved."(Martin,1976). Strategies are developed at different levels namely (a) Corporate level; (b) Functional level and (c) Operational level. Hence an enterprise will respectively develop its corporate plan, functional plan and implementation plan in order to achieve its goals.

An action plan is an implementation plan. It is a process of preparing short-term plans to operationalize the corporate and functional strategies. This lesson will discuss the importance of an action plan and the ways and means of developing it.

Importance of Action Plans

An action plan is prepared within the framework of long-range strategic planning which outlines the goals and objectives of an organization. It is a plan of detailed and specific actions needed to achieve organizational goals. Therefore, an action plan is a link between the organization's strategies and current operations. It also has a set of proposed solutions in place, for anticipated problems in the future. In short, an action plan is a breakdown of corporate and functional plans into very small and specific activities and /or operations. For example, if a National College of Education decides to increase the intake of teacher trainees by 50 percent in the next five years, it has to consider specific activities namely budgeting, developing infra-structure (such as classrooms, hostels, playgrounds), recruitment of additional academic and support staff, finding more practicing schools and so on. These specific activities are included in an action plan.

These activities are carried out by various sub-systems of the organization within a time frame and in a synchronized manner. An action plan allocates specific tasks and necessary resources to the managers at the operational levels. Therefore, an action plan is put into action at the lower management levels. It delegates responsibility and

authority to individual managers and also imposes accountability on them for expected results. It communicates organizational goals and objectives to the managers in the lower levels of the organization and also effectively links them to the higher levels of management. It integrates large numbers of units and people within and outside the organization into one meaningful and motivated force that will tirelessly work for the achievement of organizational goals.

One of the most important characteristics of an action plan is, therefore, flexibility that accommodates internal and external contingencies that crop up during the implementation process. Therefore, an action plan calls for frequent review and reformulation to effectively face the unforeseen changes in the internal and external environment.

How to develop an Action Plan?

As mentioned earlier action planning is the process of spelling out all operations of the organization and reducing them to the lowest possible operational level. It also gives the answer to *who* will perform *what*, *when*, *where* and *how* and the *cost* of each such activity.

Basic steps in developing an action plan are given below (Martin, 1976)

1. *Dividing total operations*

It is important to break the total operations into specific, measurable tasks so that each and every task can be assigned to appropriate and skillful individuals and monitored and evaluated. It is also possible to align each and every task to the overall operation of the organization based on its corporate plan. For example if the National College of Education wishes to increase its intake of teacher trainees by 50 percents over the next five years a number of activities such as expansion of infrastructure, and recruitment of staff are involved. The expansion of infrastructure of the College is related to a number of activities such as getting approval from the Ministry of Education, designing the classroom, hostel etc, estimating the cost, calling tenders etc. Each of these in turn requires another set of activities; for example, calling tenders involves a number of activities such as advertising, appointment of tender committee, evaluation of tenders, awarding the tenders etc. As another example, advertising needs designing the

advertisement, costing, getting approvals, deciding on newspapers etc. Thus in action planning every activity is reduced into the smallest possible task

2. Recognizing relationship between each of these operations

Dividing an activity into sub-tasks needs the recognition of relationships between the sub-tasks as the performance of one task depends on the completion of another task. Therefore it is important to sequence the tasks to reduce delays and increase efficiency.

3. Deciding the responsibility for each task

The responsibility of performing each task should be assigned to specific individuals or a group of individuals. Assigning responsibility also needs the determination of the level of responsibility. However routine activities do not go into the activity plan. For example driving and maintaining the office vehicle is the responsibility of the driver. Since it is a routine task, it does not go into the action plan.

4. Deciding the method of doing each task

The methods and procedure of performing a particular task should also be incorporated into the action plan. It is important to understand and evaluate the possible difficulties and obstacles that may be encountered when performing the task.-

5. Determining the resource and their availability

Physical, human and financial resources are required to perform a task. An action plan should include statements regarding the availability of resources, and the strategy for acquiring necessary resources not currently held. Budgeting is the term used for estimating the actual cost of the resources necessary to deliver outcomes, including the cost of people's time.

6. Estimating the time required for each task

The action plan should also indicate the date/time a particular task will commence and the date/time it will be completed. The complete set of times for a plan is called a 'timeline'. When deciding on the timeline, consideration must be given to possible or predictable delays based on both available information and past experience.

Summary

At present a number of tools are available to prepare an action plan. A Gantt chart is a commonly used tool for action plans and projects. **An example** of an action plan using Gantt chart is given below:

Action Plan

Training Programme for Lecturers at the National College of Education

Activities	Respon	Time												Input	Output	Remar ks
		Jan				Feb				Mar						
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4			
1. Discussion with Dean	Mr.SK													Agend a	Guidelines	
2. Reserving lecture rooms 2.1. Prepare letter	Mr SK													Letter	Reservatio n	
3. Preparatio n of handouts 3.1 Collect Stationary 3.2	Ms.TN													Rs. 2500	6 handouts	

References

Martin, C.C. (1976). *Project Management: How to make it work*, Amacom, New York