

IMPROVEMENT SKILLS CONSULTING LTD.

“Simply, improvement...”



OpenStrategies: An Introduction

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“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.” [Peter Drucker]

What is OpenStrategy?

An OpenStrategy is a system designed specifically for strategic planning in a multi-stakeholder environment, and is an effective method for improving collaboration, reducing duplication of effort, engaging stakeholders and delivering outcomes through a facilitated, bottom-up approach to strategic planning.

OpenStrategy is being used by a number of local councils, regional assemblies, and unitary authorities for strategies such as:

-  Sustainable Community Strategies
-  Local Area Agreements
-  Local Strategic Partnerships
-  Regional Sustainability Strategies
-  Children and Young People’s Strategies
-  Regeneration
-  Sustainable Procurement
-  Clean – Safe - Green

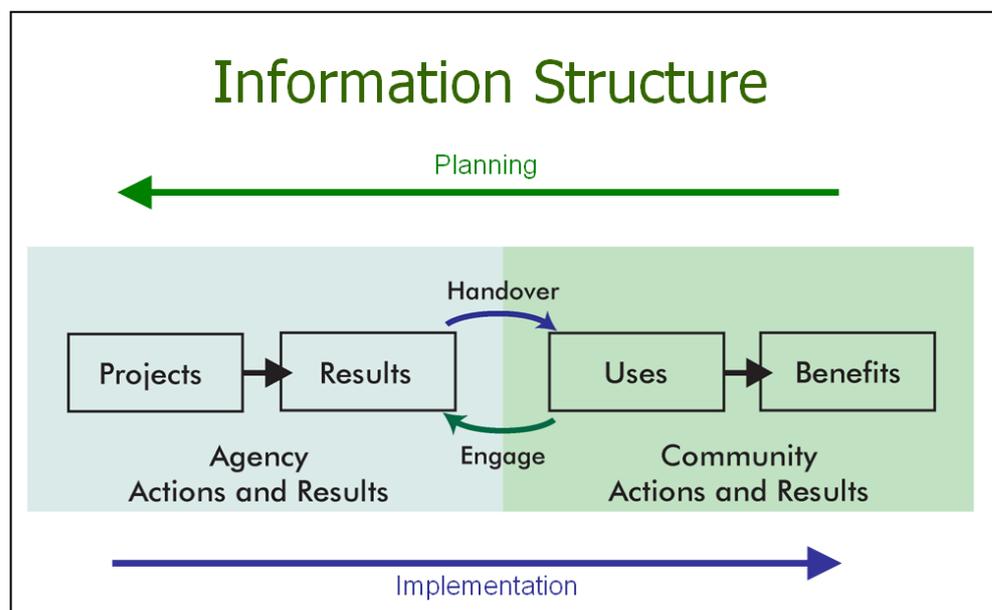
OpenStrategy comprises an information mapping tool, an effective facilitation process, and supporting training and hard-copy tools.

OpenStrategy is based on the following principles, and incorporates them into the OpenStrategy system:

- Communities are intelligently complex, not chaotic. Therefore, they do not require top-down management, and given the right tools can plan their own future in a collaborative, transparent, and strategic manner
- An effective strategic planning tool needs to be open - to new ideas, to people, to time, space, growth, and change
- Stakeholders can join an OpenStrategy, and no-one can take control of it
- An effective strategic planning tool needs a common system and language
- An effective strategic planning tool needs to be actions and results oriented
- Communities and groups of individuals can successfully collaborate on large-scale projects following a diverse cluster of motivational drives and social signals - to review and select which resources to work on, for which projects, and with which collaborators

The OpenStrategy Structure

The OpenStrategy Information Structure is very simple and is made up of four sets of information - generically called 'items'.

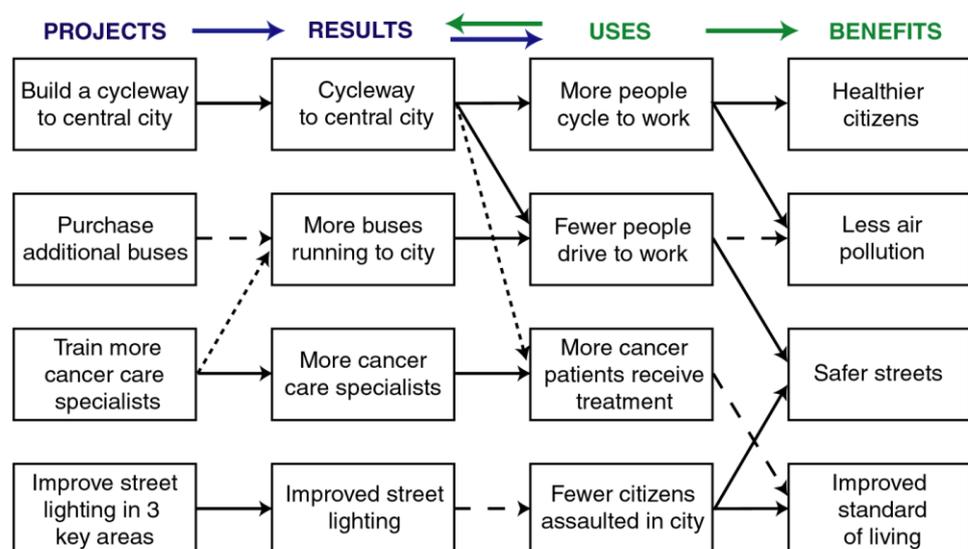


Organisations run Projects that produce Results, which citizens or communities Use to create Benefits. Although the columns of information are named Projects, Results, Uses and Benefits, the terminology can be determined by the participants of an OpenStrategy. OpenStrategies' research leads them to believe that this structure has universal application to community strategies; anything a community wants to do or achieve can be addressed by these headings.

For example, the Project might be the development of a cycleway. The Result is that you have a cycleway between two points. The Use is that people ride on it, and the Benefits are that they become healthier, get to work on time, and environmental pollution is reduced if they would have otherwise used cars.

Stakeholders enter these items into the system, which are then 'owned' by that stakeholder. This means that that stakeholder is responsible for keeping information about that item up to date, answering questions about it, and accepting or rejecting links to that item.

An OpenStrategy presents this system of information in a structure called the boxes-and-lines diagram, which has a list of Projects in one column, a list of Results in another column, a list of Uses in the third and a list of Benefits in the fourth. In time, the boxes are linked, so a Project is linked to a Result. It might produce several Results - and those Results are linked to their Uses by stakeholders, and the Uses to one or more Benefits, as illustrated in the following diagram:



Stakeholders can also propose links between two items, which means that they believe that one item has an effect, positive or negative, on the other. In the previous example, a stakeholder could create a link between the Project of creating a cycleway, and the obvious Result of having a cycleway between two points.

Stakeholders are free to accept (agree that a link exists) or reject links to items that they own.

Because everyone can see the information entered and the links made, they can see what is going on and consult with each other in a fully transparent manner.

Prioritisation

The information structure maps actions and results into a plan. It is not just a listing of issues and options and people's random ideas. It is very much focused on actions and results. The information structure is useful on its own as a format for information storage, but it needs prioritisation before the system attains its maximum possible value.

Through use of the OpenStrategy prioritisation system, stakeholders can specify and view SubStrategies (a smaller strategy contained within the entire OpenStrategy). These SubStrategies can be created by stakeholders, based on their own areas of interest, and from whatever set of criteria they specify. For example, within a council planning OpenStrategy, a stakeholder could specify to view all items in the OpenStrategy to do with roads, effectively creating a roads SubStrategy.

Applying OpenStrategy

Over time, an OpenStrategy evolves to become an interlinked map of everything happening and planned within a community. From this big picture, SubStrategies can be distilled based on themes such as transport, community cohesion, health, and so on.

Despite the simplicity of the system, it can be used in many ways:

- It provides a simple big picture of what's happening or could happen
- It interconnects information flowing from projects to benefits
- It clarifies co-production by organisations and the community
- It interconnects stakeholders
- It's created by stakeholders so they "buy-in" to it
- It distils SubStrategies which can be implemented
- It helps different partnerships to cluster around different SubStrategies

- It constantly evolves to respond to new ideas and changing circumstances
- It enables integrated multi-level working (national, regional, county, district, local)
- It helps clarify stakeholder roles (national, regional, county, district, local)
- It supports localism by simplifying transparent stakeholder engagement and consultation
- It underpins place-shaping through demonstrated/earned local leadership
- It enables shared (but not pooled) resources
- It simplifies and clarifies scrutiny/audit/self regulation (Quality Assurance, not Quality Control)

Some examples of the OpenStrategies created in the UK include:

- A Sustainable Procurement OpenStrategy (Regional Assembly)
- A Partnership of Partnerships OpenStrategy (County Council)
- A Cleaner Environment OpenStrategy (Unitary Authority)
- A Broads Regeneration OpenStrategy (District Council)
- A Children and Young Persons OpenStrategy (County Council)
- A Youth Engagement OpenStrategy (District Council)
- A Service Improvement Plan (District Council)

What others are saying

Colin Berg, Chief Executive of Monmouthshire County Council: “The ability of the PRUB approach to link together the contribution of different partnerships produces a focus on outcomes”.

Arwel Jones, Chief Executive’s Dept., Gwynedd County Council: “OpenStrategy was crucial and it has enabled us to draw together actions in more specific areas which could be packaged together”.

Our track record

Our consultants have been helping organisations in the private and public sectors to manage and improve performance for nearly two decades. We have supported Quality Award winners in their approach to performance improvement and many public sector organisations engaged in partnership working.

We are not wedded to a particular methodology. We work in partnership with organisations like OpenStrategies UK Ltd. to help clients identify their improvement goals and then develop an approach to achieve these; invariably ensuring their people develop the skills to make further improvements themselves.

OpenStrategies is a partner of Improvement Skills Consulting. Visit their website at www.openstrategies.co.uk

Please contact us for more information about how we can help you to manage and improve the outcomes achieved through your organisation's partnerships.



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