

How To Overcome the 7 D's of Government and Corporate Decision-making Processes

I. Strategic Planning and Strategic Action are Key to Overcoming the 7 D's

Keys to overcoming the 7 D's are strategic planning and action. Many citizen groups confuse being *active* (holding public events, distributing fact sheets and pamphlets, releasing reports, organizing protests, lobbying) with strategic action that is *effective* (activities that actually move you closer to winning changes to government laws, regulations, policies, programs, or plans, *and/or* changes to the policies, plans or activities of corporations, *and/or* changes to the values, beliefs or actions of individuals).

Not that it is easy to be active -- it takes time, effort, and money all of which are often lacking -- but it is much more difficult to be effective. Given that most citizen groups will put as much effort and money into being active as they would put into being effective, why not take the extra time to plan strategically so your activities will have a much better chance of actually changing something?

To plan and act strategically, it is essential:

1. to know everything about your political landscape;
2. to know how to plan strategically, and;
3. to know how to do all of the possible activities that could help you win the changes you are seeking.

If you don't know all of these things, you and your citizen group will very likely spend most of your time banging your heads against the walls in governments and corporations designed to shut out citizens, instead of walking through the doors that exist in those walls and winning the changes you want.

The 7 D's make up most of these walls, and they are usually (but not always) used by governments and corporations in the following order to resist change:

Density

You are not dealing with democratic structures when you are dealing with Canadian governments and corporations - they structure themselves in ways that are difficult to understand on purpose, so that most people will get overwhelmed (or bored) just trying to figure out how they work, and will give up before they even try to get them to change.

The size of governments and large corporations (for example, there are 400,000 federal government public servants, along with 5,000 federal politicians and political staff) "dehumanize" and "depersonalize" governments and corporations. The size also makes no one directly responsible for anything (to be able to say that "mistakes were made" but not penalize anyone), which has the effect of making it very difficult to figure out who to lobby for changes to anything.

To be effective:

1. Find a lawyer and/or professional lobbyist who will, for free, help you find out every single law, regulation, policy that applies, and every tax, subsidy and program that is in place.
2. Use the Access to Information law and system to find out the secrets governments don't want you to know.
3. Read "industry" magazines that are written only for people in governments and corporations -- they contain much more detailed information than the mainstream media
4. Recognize that governments and large corporations are not just institutions, they are made up of thousands of humans with diverse interests and views -- find inside allies who can help you figure out how things work, and what is happening behind closed doors.

Deny

Beyond being dense in ways that confuse many people every day, governments and corporations will often greet any proposal for change with a denial that there is a problem, or any proposed solution with a denial that it would solve the problem.

To be effective:

1. Prove there is a problem beyond a shadow of a doubt -- imagine you are in court and have to convince a jury of strangers that there is a problem.
2. Prove that your solution will work beyond a shadow of a doubt.
3. Use "dilemma" actions to corner the government so that if they deny your proposal, they will also be denying something fundamentally important to Canadians. For example, a small, non-violent April 2001 protest in Ottawa demanded that Canadians be allowed to view the draft Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) before the government signed it. In order to deny the release of the draft agreement, the federal government would have had to say that Canadians did not have a right to see the draft, which goes against the fundamental democratic principle of the public's right to know. Within a few days of the protest the Canadian government changed its position and pushed for the release of draft agreement, and it was released a few months later.)

Delay

The size of governments and large corporations means almost everything moves slowly. In part this delay is justified and democratic, as it gives stakeholders time to digest, defend, discuss and debate proposals for change.

But governments and corporations also use delay to try to stop proposals for change. For example, they will often appoint a task force or committee or commission to examine an issue even if the issue has already been examined. They then often choose people to serve on the task force who will support their claim that there is no problem, or that your proposed solution is useless.

In addition, the delay can often make it difficult for citizen groups to continue to participate in the decision-making process.

Finally, governments and corporations often delay complying with rulings by courts (for example, many governments have ignored rulings concerning aboriginal rights for decades).

To be effective:

1. Assume that your campaign will take at least 5 years to win the change you are seeking, and if you know the government's or corporation's timeline for the decision-making process, double the time they have planned for the process so that you plan for the inevitable delays.
2. Never applaud promises to act, only applaud action. Governments and corporations will often make promises to act as a way of shifting attention from an issue and delay action, and if you applaud their words you will help them delay action.
3. Be prepared to go to court to force action.

Discredit

If denial and delay haven't worked to stop a proposal for change, governments and corporations will often try to discredit those making the proposals. Usually, groups are discredited for things they say, for not representing enough people, for aligning themselves with one political party and/or for using violence.

To be effective:

1. Be very, very careful about what you say publicly and privately. Public statements can either build support for you, or take it away, while private statements can create rumours that can help or hurt you. Don't exaggerate -- for example, don't ever say someone or some government is a Nazi and is doing something as bad as the Holocaust unless they *actually are*. Don't lie, don't criticize how someone looks -- stick to the merits of your proposals and the gaps and loopholes in the government's or corporation's proposals.
2. Don't use violence in *any* way unless you *actually* have exhausted *every* possible avenue for winning the changes you want and *each* time you were rejected in a *clearly undemocratic* way. Violence is not needed to change most things in Canada, and polls show very clearly that Canadians do not support groups that use violence.

3. Build a large coalition of groups from across the political spectrum, and keep the coalition completely non-partisan (not aligned with any political party).

Divide

If your group/network/coalition has overcome the 4 Ds set out above, the government or corporation will start feeling real pressure to make the change you want. At this point, they will often try to buy off some of the groups in your coalition with either money, or by promising them 1/2 or less of the changes you want.

To be effective:

1. Anticipate the "divide" tactic when forming your network/coalition, and only invite other groups to participate if they commit to staying in the coalition through the whole process.
2. As soon as you have decided your network/coalition's proposals, also decide how many of the changes the government or corporation will have to make before you will applaud. If they don't make that many changes, make sure everyone in the network/coalition criticizes their "half-measures".

Deceive

If the "divide" tactic works, then governments and corporations usually do not have to use the "deceive" tactic, because some of the groups in your network/coalition will have applauded the government or corporation, and that will be a "win" for them.

However, governments and corporations often still use the "deceive" tactic -- spinning their announcement of their solution to make it seem like it is more than it is. Given that 80% of Canadians only read, hear or view news headlines, governments and corporations only have to get a good headline about their solution and they will have successfully deceived 80% of Canadians.

To be effective:

1. Anticipate the "deceive" tactic and educate key media (including key reporters, columnists and editorial boards) about what is a real solution to the problem, so that they will write critical headlines, articles and columns if the government or corporation only offers a half-measure.
2. Never applaud words, only applaud actions (see #2 above under "Delay" for details).
3. Keep your issue and proposals in the news (with reports, events, news releases, letters-to-the-editor, opinion pieces) because often governments and corporations will try to "distract" the public from the problem and changes you want, or they will try to "decrease" public expectations about the possibility of solving the problem.

Destroy

The "destroy" tactic has been used rarely in Canada as usually one of the other 6 Ds works to stop almost every proposal for change. However, if you are working on a fundamental issue (such as aboriginal land rights) do not underestimate government and corporations capacity to destroy your group, or individuals in your group.

Discrimination, especially systemic discrimination, is part of the "destroy" tactic. Using the other 6 Ds can also destroy people and groups through burnout.

To be effective:

1. Be careful about everything you do. Follow the laws, regulations and societal expectations that apply to your organization, and to yourself (one of the best ways of destroying a group or person is to find them doing something illegal).

Overall, don't let the difficulties of the 7 D's have the 3D effect of disheartening, discouraging and defeating you and your citizen group. Instead, design your strategy to overcome the 7 D's with your own 7-Ds -- dazzling, democratic, dramatic, dynamic, disciplined, dedicated, diverse (in other words, effective) actions.

(This "How To" piece was inspired by Michelle Brill-Edwards, former Canadian federal public servant who blew the whistle in the mid-1990s on Health Canada's corporate-driven drug approval process)