Search Conference in Community Development Planning

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지역사회개발 계획에 있어서의 탐색 회의

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요 약

탐색회의는 조직이나 지역사회의 사람들로 하여금 그들의 가장 바람직한 미래를 규정하고 참여에의 책임감을 강조하는 과업수행을 위한 전략을 만들어낼 수 있도록 하는 참여적 계획 방법이다. 참여자들은 가능한 한 다양한 배경을 지닌 사람들이며, 그리하여 그들이 지니고 있는 지역사회에 대한 자신들의 지식과 과정을 변화시킬 수 있는 기술을 가지고 지역사회 개발에 기여할 수 있다. 탐색회의는 이루어져야만 하는 특별한 활동들을 규정하고 필요한 변화를 만들어낼 책임을 지니는 사람들에게 힘을 부여함으로써 표준적인 전략 계획보다 훨씬 더욱 유용한 결과를 산출한다. 계획과정에의 전체 지역사회의 참여는 바람직한 결과를 지역사회 전체가 소유할 개연성을 증가시키는 데, 이는 과업을 수행하는데 필수불가결하고 지역사회가 희망하는 목표를 성취하는데 중심적인 조건이다. 효과적인 지역사회 개발 계획을 위한 탐색회의의 성공적인 수행을 위해서는, 중앙정부가 지방정부의 탐색회의와 관련된 교육 프로그램을 제공해야 하는데, 이는 탐색회의가 참여자들을 조직하고 관리하는 따위와 같은 얼마간의 기술을 필요로 하기 때문이다.

I. Introduction

A community should either find its niche (i.e. the commodities or products that can have advantages in the international trade market) or protest against globalism to survive if communities fail to find a niche under globalism (McMichael, 1996).

The Community Development Academy (1997) illustrated that the past structure of a community is the system in which the relationship between one part to the other is a "Top-Down". A new view of a community is more of a "horizontal structure" (Warren, 1978, p. 164), in which all parts of the community are incorporated with one another. This new view of community structure is the mixture between both the "Top-Down" and "Bottom-Up" approaches. The Community Development Academy (CDA, 1997) has referred to this as interactions among people for mutual support.

However, the government of Korea has indoctrinated community development with a quick-fix approach with the "Top-Down" approach. The "Top-Down" approach worked successfully because Korean central government had suppressed its communities and organizations to a great extent. However, in the trends of decentralization of power over community development planning and actions, conflicts

among local residents, local government, and central government used to happen in Korea because the Korean government continued to use the "Top-Down" approach. These conflicts over community development used to produce inefficiency to both local people and the central government.

To implement successful community development planning and actions, participatory research method is frequently used in community development studies (Cheong, et al., 1995). Participatory research maintains that the actors in the situation are not merely objects of someone else's study but are actively influencing the process of knowledge-generation and elaboration.

One of the participatory methods in community development is search conference, which has been used for several decades in other countries but never in Korea. Search conference is a participatory planning method that enables people in an organization or community to identify their most desirable future and to generate strategies for implementation that emphasize the responsibility of participation. Conflicts over community development among local residents, local government, and central government will be reduced because every concerned person can involve in search conference processes if search conference is utilized in community development planning and actions.

Ⅱ. Participation of citizens in community development

Community development process is made up of two essential elements. First, it is composed of the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living, with as much reliance as possible on their own initiatives. Second, community development is made up of the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective (1963, United Nations, quoted in McCaslin, 1993). Community development is the purposeful effort by community people to learn and work together to guide the future development of their communities making full use of their own resources as well as external resources (Community Development Academy, 1997).

Citizen participation in the process of planning and implementation is the essential part to increase the success possibilities of community development. The effective planning process and the involvement of each stakeholder are essential to achieve goals regardless of any communities. Traditionally most communities have relied on some expert's knowledge and skills to develop and implement their development. These efforts have assumptions that experts have the best knowledge and skill in order to develop communities so that they can manage the development process. However, they do not have enough knowledge about specific community histories and communities visions what the community members want to achieve. In addition, they can only make a plan without considering the community's specific need and then leave. The plans developed have just left on the shelf.

Citizen participation has been touted as a way to address many of the issues confronting community residents. Providing opportunities to influence public policy through citizen participation are an important aspect of a healthy and competent community (Smith, 1984).

The successful community development depends on its ability to articulate a unifying

vision, and to translate that vision into action a way that dramatically expands both resources available to the field and the range of major stakeholders in its success. However, the community development field will asked to do more with less.

One of the greatest challenges to planners is to set up local mechanisms that allow for true participation and bring true influence to bear on policy formulation. Such activities could shift the responsibility for improving or changing neighborhood conditions to the neighborhood residents and could function to enhance their sense of empowerment and, ultimately, their sense of community (Julian, et. al, 1997).

In any healthy community or community visioning effort, the question of whether the community continues to work toward agreed-on goals or whether it falters along the way is of paramount importance. There are some common characteristics for successful communities. First, successful communities look at systematic change, not just quick fixes. They recognize that the only true locus of fundamental change is people's choice grounded in their culture, not in moneys and programs. Second, successful communities have a starting point with shared values and a shared vision. A vision — a statement of values projected as reality into the future — can articulate where a community wants to go and what idea performance it desires. Third, successful communities try everybody to involve and build ownership across all sectors. A commitment must be made to developing widespread community ownership and civic engagement. Successful communities embrace processes that mobilize all citizens and the institutions of civil society for continues improvement. Fourth, successful communities know that the health and

sustainability of a community are products of the whole community working, not a result of isolated interventions in any single sector.

III. Search conference

The basis of search conference is participation of people in the community. It assumes that people are purposeful, ideal seeking, and capable of rising to a level of thinking and acting for the greater community good. Search conference is a participatory planning method that enables people in an organization or community to identify their most desirable future and to generate strategies for implementation that emphasize the responsibility of participation. It allows people with divergent interest, histories, and values to discover common ground by focusing on what they share, rather than on where they differ. It produces much more useful results than standard strategic planning by both identifying specific actions which must be taken and empowering the people who will be responsible for making the necessary change. The involvement of the whole community in planning process increase the likelihood of community wide ownership of desired outcomes, a condition that is essential for implementation and central to achieving the community's desired goals.

The search conference is designed to accommodate between 20 and 100 people in the room together. Participants come from as various backgrounds as possible so that they can contribute to community development with everyone's own knowledge on community and skill to change process. These participants need to be highly diverse, not only in areas of interest and opinion, but also in age, sex, and social background because they will bring different

ideas into the conference.

The search conference is holistic and considers the company or community as a system. It resembles analyses of the inner process of an organism or an organization that try to regulate the part process to the whole (Emery & Trist, 1965; Emery & Emery, 1974) and resembles the theories of Geatalt psychology (Woodworth, 1952) and cognitive balance (Heider, 1946, 1958). In addition, the search conference regulates the community as a whole to the society of which is a part. Thus, the approach is directed toward society as an "open system model" (Emery & Trist, 1965; Emery & Emery, 1978).

1. Characteristics of search conference

The search conference focuses on learning, not teaching. The ability to learn is central to the search design because learning is essential for effective change. Participants learn about patterns of events and forces in their larger environment and community, as well as, why their neighbor's views of the world might differ from their owns. This notion is based on research showing that human beings have a natural ability to extract information from their environment and, as a result, can directly perceive meaning in it. In search conference, the everyday wisdom of the average citizens supercedes expert knowledge.

Second, conflict and differences are just acknowledged, not tried to solve. Rather than attempting to establish unanimity and consensus on each issues, search conference help people take a rational view of their very real differences. It means that rationalizing differences allow people to distinguish between differences of a semantic versus a substantive nature. Search conference methodology assumes conflicts will

always exist among people, but they can begin to learn from their differences. Search conference provide communities with an opportunity to discover and work on their areas of agreement, instead of expending energy in endless debate on where they disagree.

2. Search conference processes

Search conference can be divided into 3 phases: preparation, search conference and following-up. The second phase can be more specified as four steps: focusing on the past, analyzing the current state, creating the future vision and making action plan. The details will be discussed.

Phase I: Preparation

Any change process begins with a well-designed plan. Preparation is critical element for search conference to be successful. Tasks of this phase are to decide goals of the conference, participants, conference place, date and duration. Depending on the community's specific situation, all can be made very flexibly. Goal should be clarified before having meeting and informed of all participants so that they can have some time to be prepared for the conference.

Next task is to decide the participants. One of purposes of search conference is to represent as many representatives as possible to gain community member's ideas, creativity, energy, and commitment, which are necessary elements for successful planning and implementation. Even there are no clear-cut criteria to decide participants, goals to be achieved, and the whole processes from planning to implementation to follow-up should be kept in mind. For example, those who have the best well-informed infor-

mation or experiences about community or specific topic should participate in the planning steps. Furthermore, informal opinion leaders could be more effective in implementation steps.

Third, the timing and duration are another factor to be considered. Weisbord recommends to begin at Thursday afternoon or night. If participants have the uncompleted task, they are more likely to keep the task in mind longer than other completed ones, calls 'effect'. Also he recommends three to seven days long meeting. However, it depends on the financial conditions or topics that need to be dealt in conference. In addition, the place of conference and some other information need to be planned. For example, "Is the conference room enough to accommodate all participants?" "Is the place convenient enough for everyone to get there and quiet enough to discuss?"

Phase II. Search conference

Search conference itself doesn't work anything, but all of participants work together to accomplish community goals. Each community has its own objectives and priority along the timeline. What participants need to do is to find out common ground that all community members can share, thus building driving forces to change. Here are four separate steps on detail about what participants need to do.

Step 1: Looking back the past.

All participants need to share its history over time to increase common understanding. Search conference can start by looking back the past to generate data about significant events that happened in the community by asking participants to remember and list information by themselves, and then having them hang the sheets

on the wall to share together. The past information can serve to bond the group and give everyone a chance to practice the data analysis process and experience success. Pride and ownership can increase as participants recognize that the community had already experienced some innovative success.

Step 2: Analyzing the current state.

Understanding the community's current situation is essential factors to plan development planning. The process of writing each one's view about the community on the flip chart can create a "group memory". This activity can increase ownership and responsibility by expressing their own agenda, personal issues, and disappointments with the community. Giving voice to these issues helps diffuse the emotion behind them. Participants also can learn through the sharing of information across groups.

Task of each group is to generate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that the community currently has. Each group does individually discuss its capabilities, making a list of the discussion outcome, and hanging them on the wall. Each group presents to all participants and shares the discussion outcomes. Through this process, all participants recognize what they need to change and what they need to continue.

Step 3: Creating the future vision.

The future vision should be created by the community member that they can share each other. Each group task is to develop the future vision of their community. We need to differentiate the difference between vision and goal. While goal means some specific and measurable things, vision is more subtle and

emotional and plays a role that provides a certain direction in the future. In this stage, the facilitator needs to give some information on how to dramatize their vision such as TV news story, magazine feature, newspaper article, or trade show, based on the previous information developed.

After creating the future vision, the whole group convenes to identify themes that emerged from their activity.

Step 4: Developing an action plan

Now we are prepared to develop an action plan. Every participant looked back the communities past, analyzed the current community's capability to build healthy community, and drawn the future vision. What need to be considered is the available resources including budget, sponsorship, timeline, and so on.

Phase III. Following-up

It is a time to evaluate the ultimate success of the conference and its ability to generate results for the real world. Progress is assessed and plans are modified as needed. It is also a time to celebrate individual and groups success.

IV. Conclusion

Community is where the conscience of a people and a nation resides. Community provides a moral center and a sense of place (Norris, 1997). Communities do not only possess a profound faith in the wisdom, creativity, and leadership capacities of citizens, but they also recognize that, without shared leadership and responsibilities, community or society is not sustainable.

The government of Korea used quick-fix

methods in community development for several decades. It seemed to work successfully because no oppositions against central government community development planning and actions were possible under the Korean political situation during those decades. In the trends of decentralization of power over community development planning and actions, conflicts among local residents, local government, and central government used to happen in Korea. It is not easy for anyone to solve the conflicts after they have happened. Even though the conflicts are resolved as a result of successful discussion among related persons, the effects of the conflicts are not easily dissolved.

A community search conference is a carefully planned and designed event in a community plans its own future and takes responsibility for making it happen. Search conference can achieve two outcomes of critical importance to any healthy community effort: mobilizing people to take responsibility for the future of their community and building the skills and capacities for real system change. Search conferences create learning communities. Participants learn about patterns of events and forces in their larger environment and community, as well as, why their neighbors' views of the world might differ from their owns.

Search conference has never been used in Korea regardless of its great benefits in community development. If the search conference method is introduced and utilized in community development planning and actions in Korea, conflicts among local residents, local government, and central government will be reduced. These conflicts will be reduced because every concerned person can involve in search conference processes. Therefore, they can work together to create

healthy communities. Search conference could be one of the methods to help build our healthier society.

For successful implementation of search conference for effective community development planning, several recommendations are proposed. First, local residents should voluntarily involve themselves in search conferences if they are provided. Second, local authorities should understand the purposes, procedures, results, and benefits of search conferences. They should use search conference in their community development planning and actions in order to obtain their community members' ideas, creativity, energy, and commitment. Experts in search conferences should help the local authorities implement search conference. Third, the central government should initiate the process and encourage local authorities to utilize search conferences in their community development planning and actions. The central government should provide educational programs relating to search conference for local authorities because search conference requires some skills such as organizing and managing participants.

The search conference is not a magical answer or the only effective community-based planning process. However, healthy communities do not just happen by chance or through fortunate circumstances. Creating healthy communities takes effective planning, buy-in, and commitment from the whole community. Search methodology appears to be an effective method for meeting the significant challenges faced by communities today.

V. References

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