

Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement in Local Government Services to China's Migrant Workers

The Experience of Fushun and Shehong County Governments, Sichuan Province
By Peter Bracegirdle, October 2008

1. Introduction

Strategic planning, public participation, and performance measurement are popular ways of helping governments improve their services. These approaches will help governments focus on priorities, reduce costs, expand service channels, and deliver service benefits to their citizens.

Some Chinese government agencies are already using these approaches for service improvement. Visitors to Beijing are asked upon arrival at the international airport to rate the efficiency and friendliness of customs officials processing their entry or return to the country. No doubt, this is linked to new expectations and standards for prompt and courteous services at airports. It's easy to imagine that China's customs services have improved with the use of the performance measurement approach.

Some Chinese local governments are charting similar territory. The idea of long-term planning is old news to Chinese officials, but the way they go about this planning and target setting is changing. Local government service planning is becoming more inclusive and participatory in nature. More stakeholders are getting involved – not just leaders and department heads – but service delivery staff, service partners, and service users especially. Performance measurement is more concerned with service outcomes and benefits to citizens. This has helped government services become more citizen-centered and results-oriented.

Last year, Fushun and Shehong county governments in Sichuan province embarked on this path. They have since developed strategic plans for improving services to migrant workers, and designed performance measurement systems that are suited to their 'migrant-centered services' approach. Judging by Canadian experience, the county governments will need more time before they start seeing the full benefits of the approach. But they are now positioned to learn more about what they do well and what they need to improve from the customer's point of view.

This article makes a case study of the strategic planning and performance measurement approaches taken in Fushun and Shehong counties. It begins with an explanation of the concepts of strategic planning and public participation, and provides an example of their use in the City of Ottawa, Canada's capital. It describes the strategic plans developed in Fushun and Shehong, showcasing the participatory processes they used in service planning. It identifies critical factors in successful service planning and draws lessons from the Fushun and Shehong experience. It makes recommendations to other local governments for the effective use of strategic planning and performance measurement in delivering government services to China's migrant workers.

2. Strategic Planning in Canadian Municipalities

Concept of Strategic Planning in Canadian Municipalities. Strategic planning is a forward-looking exercise that helps local governments focus on what is important to their customers and stakeholders. (Stakeholders are groups or individuals who are involved in, or have an interest in, the delivery of government services.) Strategic planning helps Canadian municipal governments to establish priorities and develop implementation strategies and action plans for achieving their goals. These planning exercises focus the efforts of leaders, managers and service staff, and help create buy-in to a longer-term change and improvement process.

Strategic planning is an inclusive exercise that usually involves describing trends in the municipal context; identifying the needs and priorities of customers and stakeholders; setting goals and targets for delivering service outputs and outcomes; assessing existing systems and approaches for achieving goals; developing implementation strategies and core activities; budgeting for service outputs and outcomes; and developing measures for tracking actual performance against what was expected and planned. Strategic plans will respond to longer-term visions for the municipality, while being implemented through the detailed plans of service branches.

In Canada, the rationale for inclusive planning with stakeholder groups, and the criteria used for selecting participants in the process, are based on common sense. If you are affected by the outcomes of the plan, you should be part of planning those outcomes. If you have unique information to help shape the plan – if you are a customer or expert – then you should be given a chance to provide this information. The quality of the plan will improve with the inclusion of these stakeholders and their varied perspectives.

Strategic Planning in the City of Ottawa. The City of Ottawa provides a good example of the nature and process of corporate planning in Canadian municipalities. Ottawa is the capital of Canada located on a large river separating Ontario and Quebec. About 750,000 people live in the city working mostly in the government sector, or information technology, tourism, manufacturing, and professional services. In Canada, Ottawa is a ‘receiving city’ for many workers from neighbouring towns and professionals from across the country.

In 2003, Ottawa developed a 20-year vision for the future of the city. The Ottawa 20/20 Vision called for a set of detailed implementation plans, including a City Strategic Plan and a Long-Range Financial Plan. The City Strategic Plan provides a strategic map for city stakeholders to follow during the 4-year term of the elected city council.

The Ottawa Strategic Plan (2007-2010) establishes six service priorities and three transformation priorities for the achievement of goals outlined in the Ottawa 20/20 Vision. These nine priorities guide the city’s decision-making and its cooperation with citizens and partnerships with community groups. They also provide a framework for multi-year budgets and detailed reviews of the main branches of the local government. Branch reviews help these government service centers to clarify their expected outcomes,

set targets for achieving outcomes, determine service standards, and document the risks and risk management approaches. This type of planning helps Ottawa's leaders make informed decisions about resource allocation.

While developing the strategic plan, the City of Ottawa gathered the views of its citizens through web surveys, ward meetings, public delegations to city hall, and a formal survey of citizens conducted by a professional survey firm. Citizens were given the opportunity to describe their priorities, concerns, satisfaction, and beliefs about what the city's future should look like.

Ottawa asked: What is the most important issue facing the city? Citizens mentioned four issues most often – transportation, transit, taxes, and waste management. Their responses helped shape the six service priorities in the City Strategic Plan. Ottawa's priorities in its strategic plan include: (1) Transportation; (2) Transit; and (3) Solid Waste and Environment; as well as (4) Infrastructure Renewal, (5) Planning and Growth Management; and (6) A Sustainable, Healthy and Active City.

Public Participation in Government Service Delivery in Canada. Citizen participation in strategic planning is one part of the broader notion of public participation in government services. Public participation involves the various ways that governments and citizens communicate, collaborate and make choices together. This can take many forms. As seen in the Ottawa example, governments will collect information from citizens about their priorities and preferences through surveys, hearings, and other feedback mechanisms. They will share information with citizens through the news media, web sites, public meetings, and notices mailed to households.

Canadian governments and citizens collaborate on special bodies, advisory boards, and oversight committees in service-specific areas such as planning, health, education, police and fire services. They collaborate in the provision of services through 'alternative service delivery' mechanisms or other funding arrangements in which non-governmental organizations, private firms, and community groups deliver services on government's behalf.

In China, there are similar examples of government-citizen collaboration in service delivery. Training institutes providing migrant workers with job skills training as part of China's Sunshine Project are one such example. Fushun and Shehong governments collaborate with a dozen or so training institutes in their counties to help them achieve local and national development goals related to internal labour migration.

3. Planning Migrant Services in Fushun and Shehong Counties

Service Context. Fushun and Shehong are rural counties in Sichuan with populations of about one million people each. They have workforces of about 600,000 labourers. About two-thirds of their labourers are working outside of the counties, many in urban centers such as Chengdu, Guangdong, and the large coastal cities. Most migrants are men, although increasing numbers of women are leaving their home county for work. Most migrants will leave their families behind and return annually during Spring Festival. A typical migrant worker is away from their home county for about seven years.

The county governments provide various services to migrant workers. Until recently, they have focused on providing employment-related services to help migrant workers identify job opportunities, secure employment, or become more employable through skills training. Now they also provide labour rights information and protection to help prevent or redress labour rights abuses. The expansion of services coincides with the development of new labour laws and regulations, such as the Labour Contract Law, and a rising number of reported violations of worker-employer agreements.

If migrant workers have inadequate awareness of their labour rights, county governments have insufficient capacity and resources to deliver the services that migrants need. Some service delivery staff members are themselves unaware of migrants' rights, or they lack the information products, programs and channels needed to build awareness. They are unable to provide services tailored to the needs of women who face particular risks and barriers to their full and fair participation in the labour market.

Service Planning. In this context, Fushun and Shehong began their strategic planning process in March 2007 with assessments of migrant needs and existing services and service delivery capacity. The assessments were carried out by a team of Chinese and Canadian experts in the field through household surveys and interviews with important service providers. The China-Canada Migrant Labour Rights Project (MLRP) had previously formed the Migrant Advisory Group, or MAG, which consists of county leaders, provincial officials, and central government officials from the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and various other departments. In June 2007, MAG members met to review the experts' reports in order to help prioritize the improvements needed in county government services.

With MAG guidance, county leaders formed 6-member County Strategic Planning Teams to carry out the planning. These teams brought together stakeholder groups consisting of department heads and deputies, service staff members, service partners, employment agencies, employers, and representatives of migrant workers in the counties. In August 2007, the planning teams and stakeholder groups participated in 3-day strategic planning workshops in the counties. The workshop participants provided their thoughts and suggestions on the substantive content of the strategic plans. After the workshop, the planning teams worked through the details of the implementation strategies. In December 2007, the county government leading groups approved their respective strategic plans and budgets.

Contents of the Strategic Plans. A good plan begins with a destination in mind and provides a route to get there. The counties’ strategic plans begin with building clear visions of service excellence, and the expected results of successful implementation. The plans identify the priority areas for improving services to migrant workers and they consolidate them into seven work-packages – what the counties call the ‘key result areas.’

	Strategic Plan for Improving Migrant Services
KRA 1	Build Knowledge and Skills of Frontline Migrant Services Staff
KRA 2	Improve Skills Training and Rights Training to Migrants
KRA 3	Improve Outreach of Information to Migrants
KRA 4	Improve Labour, Employment and Rights Services Delivery to Migrants
KRA 5	Strengthen the Coordination of Migrant Services
KRA 6	Improve Data Collection and Management
KRA 7	Improve the Rights Protection System for Migrants

The strategic plans are focused on, and organized around, the seven ‘key result areas.’ For each KRA, the plans identify implementation strategies and planned activities as well as implementation schedules and indicative budgets. Importantly, they identify departmental responsibilities for taking action and achieving results. The plans expose the risks inherent in the chosen strategies and present the risk mitigation efforts that are required. They also include information on performance measurement such as the performance indicators for change and service improvements.

A good plan will identify who does what, where, when, why, how and with what financial, human and material resources. This information is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee the plan gets implemented. Plans also need to be meaningful, understood, agreed and ‘owned’ by people involved in implementation. The counties used participatory planning approaches to build and reinforce this understanding, consensus and ownership.

4. Participatory Approach to Developing and Implementing the Strategic Plan

Fushun and Shehong county governments involved three groups of stakeholders in the development of their strategic plans. These include: (1) Central, provincial and local government officials and their technical experts; (2) County government service providers and their local partners in service delivery; and (3) Local service users, citizens or customers, including migrant workers, employers and employment agencies.

Migrant Advisory Group. As mentioned, the MAG consists of central, provincial and local government officials who are involved in policy matters and decision-making affecting migrant labourers. The inter-governmental MAG was set up to help facilitate the exchange of information on policy and research among these governments and the

sharing of effective practices in strengthening migrant labour rights. The MAG includes Chinese experts and researchers in migrant labour issues, who provide knowledge services to central, provincial and local government officials.

Given its information-sharing role, the MAG was involved in the planning process from start to finish. Its government members helped to define and guide the process by setting parameters for what became the ‘key result areas’ from policy and legislative perspectives. Its technical experts carried out the assessments of county services and migrant needs to provide empirical evidence to validate the priorities. Its members took part in the 3-day planning workshops and shared their ideas and views like other participants at the county level. Its experts delivered information sessions on China’s international commitments as related to migrant labourers; China’s labour laws, regulations and policies; and the service needs of women as a particularly vulnerable group of migrant workers. MAG members were also involved in the dissemination of information about the planning process as evidenced by this publication.

Service Providers. The strategic planning process involved the heads and deputies of offices and bureaus that provide services to migrant workers. This included, for example, representatives from departments of Labour and Social Security, Justice, Rural Development, Employment Services, and the like. The process involved representatives of the county governments’ service partners such as the Trade Union, Women’s Federation, and local training institutes. These groups have intimate understanding of the services being provided, the quality of these services, constraints and challenges, and any gaps in service provision. Their involvement helped ensure a more relevant plan tailored to current realities.

Service Users. Migrant workers, employers and employment agency representatives also attended the 3-day planning workshops. These citizens, or service customers, contributed their unique perspectives and experiences to the planning process. Citizens also provided their views during the household surveys conducted by MAG experts. While enriching the strategic plans, the participatory process demonstrated the fact that governments can solicit the views of service users without reducing their own authority or responsibility for service planning. At the end of the day, Fushun and Shehong county governments still ‘owned’ their strategic plans, which are meaningful and better understood for the participatory processes they followed.

Facilitators. Canadian experts in strategic planning and performance management facilitated the participatory planning process. In consultation with the MAG, they designed the overall process and the planning workshops with county officials and stakeholders. The facilitators shared their expertise, and used ‘brainstorming’ techniques that allowed all participants to get involved and share their thoughts.

The facilitators drafted strategic planning ‘workbooks’ for the County Strategic Planning Teams to use in finalizing their strategic plans. The workbooks presented information emerging from the 3-day planning workshop, which the teams validated, changed, removed or replaced. The strategic planning teams used the workbooks to make final

decisions about the contents of the strategic plans. As they completed their workbooks, their strategic plans emerged.

5. Critical Factors in the Design and Implementation of Strategic Plans

The experience in Fushun and Shehong helps identify the critical factors in the design and implementation of strategic plans to improve local services.

Leadership. Strategic planning is a leadership activity involving the entire organization and its stakeholders. Leaders' support is vital to the success of the planning exercise. Leaders need to understand participatory planning methodologies and the role and responsibilities of stakeholders. They should trust and support the efforts and decisions of their delegates. They need to see service users as their customers and embrace the notion that the customer knows best.

Interdepartmental coordination. County governments are complex organizations made up of large numbers of departments with responsibilities for service provision. A county strategic plan is relevant to its many departments. Interdepartmental coordination is therefore necessary for success. For Fushun and Shehong, interdepartmental coordination was enhanced through participatory processes, establishing shared goals, articulating responsibilities, making resources available, developing performance measures, and holding individual departments accountable for their performance.

Consensus-building. County strategic plans articulate a fundamental shift in thinking about government services – a shift toward 'migrant-centered services.' For successful implementation, the plans require consensus among leaders, heads and service staff on the new vision for service delivery, and the goals, strategies, responsibilities, measures and accountabilities for implementation. In Fushun and Shehong, consensus on these elements was built through stakeholder participation and ownership of the planning process, the planned activities, and the measures of success. Consensus-building continues during implementation through on-going training linked to the strategic plan.

Crosscutting approaches. County government strategic plans employ crosscutting approaches in all priority or 'key result' areas. The crosscutting approaches include: (1) Enabling public participation; (2) Aligning services with existing policies; (3) Promoting gender equality; (4) Tailoring government services to specific migrant groups; and (5) Improving the performance management of services. These approaches are suited to the vision of delivering 'migrant-centered services.' They reinforce shared norms in implementation and the measurement of success. County government leaders should help set parameters and guidelines for implementation based on a focused number of 'crosscutting approaches.'

Performance measurement. The counties' strategic plans include rigorous systems for measuring performance and results. The measurement systems shift the emphasis from what concerns governments (sending migrants) to what concerns migrant workers and their families (receiving service benefits). This change means using new measures and

data collection activities such as ‘customer satisfaction surveys.’ The counties are developing ‘service scorecards’ for offices and bureaus delivering services to migrants. This will take time to get right. Collecting the year-over-year performance data that are needed for making informed adjustments to service delivery will also take time, commitment and patience.

Resource mobilization. The counties’ strategic plans describe three years of activities. The plans require time and money for implementation. Fushun and Shehong benefit from their participation in the China-Canada Migrant Labour Rights Project, but the project is only one financial contributor to the implementation of the plan. The central, provincial, and the county governments contribute much more than the MLRP. Resource mobilization is crucial to success. Fushun and Shehong mobilized resources by acting as policy experiments in migrant rights protection, participating in the intergovernmental MAG, and organizing their work plans into discreet yet connected ‘key result areas,’ which offer potential sponsors a range of options for investment.

6. Recommendations

Strategic planning is an important exercise that can help government to prioritize its service objectives and set a clear path to reach those goals. Public engagement in this process is critical to ensure the quality of the plan. To this end, the MLRP experience provides some important lessons learned that can be absorbed and replicated by other Chinese local governments seeking to improve their services to migrant workers.

Articulate a vision for service excellence. Local government leaders should communicate their vision for change and improvement in services for migrant workers. Their vision provides a rationale for the effort needed to develop and implement a strategic plan. For Fushun and Shehong, the vision is tied to the development of ‘migrant-centered services.’ This provides a peg on which to hang all aspects of the plan.

Use participatory approaches in service planning. Local governments should engage a full range of stakeholders in service planning. This should include service managers, service providers as well as service users and citizens. Stakeholder engagement brings unique perspectives to the planning process and ensures transparency and public trust in the outcomes of the plan. Employee engagement builds understanding, consensus, support and ownership of the plan. These are necessary elements for success.

Focus plans on a few critical areas of performance. County governments should ensure their strategic plans focus on critical areas of performance. The tendency in participatory processes is sometimes to treat all areas as equally important and to set all-encompassing goals. County governments should resist the temptation and focus on what is critical, not what is possible. It is important to prioritize the work that needs to be done, and to start with those areas that are most urgent and necessary. Overloaded plans with overly ambitious goals will quickly lose support and momentum.

Focus performance measurement on service outcomes. County governments should develop performance measurement approaches that capture results from the customer's point of view. This is the best way to ensure that performance data will be used for performance improvement. In developing performance measurement systems, various levels of managers in the county governments should be clear about how they will use the performance data and be willing to revise their indicators and methods according to changing realities. Getting these systems right takes time so patience is needed.

Make performers responsible and accountable. County governments should articulate who is responsible for taking what actions and when in their strategic plan. This includes responsibilities for using performance indicators to help measure progress towards the stated goals. Departments require this clarity to perform their own duties in accordance with multi-activity plans. Performance measurement provides focus, direction, oversight and accountability structures for individual departments. County governments must be willing to act on findings about performance, which includes rewards for improved performance and sanctions for sub-standard results.

Invest in training and development. County governments should be prepared to strengthen their service delivery know-how and systems. Staff members will require training and ongoing managerial support commensurate with the vision for service excellence. Strategic plans should include a component for staff training and managerial support. If staff is competent, services will improve, and customers will enjoy benefits and express their satisfaction with the local government.

Strategic planning in the Chinese context is an exercise in consensus-building for actions needed to achieve priority goals. Performance measurement is a means of knowing whether these goals are being achieved. When used together, strategic planning and performance measurement have the potential to improve the benefits of local government services to millions of migrant workers.

About the Author

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