

Do the semantics of strategic planning make things clear?

Of course not. Who hasn't gone nearly insane in meetings wordsmithing a "vision statement"? How is a "vision" really different from "goals"? How are strategies different from tactics? How are goals different from objectives? Is there a difference between "initiatives" and tasks? You might *think* you know what these words mean, but even if you do, you can't get six other people in a room who share the same definitions. If you're ever going to use plain English, it's in planning, when absolute clarity is so important.

The two key words in Question-Based Planning are *goal* and *task*. That's it.

Can we stay focused in a meeting more than two hours?

I doubt it. Who hasn't been mentally paralysed by a five-month "strategic planning" effort? Meeting after meeting, reams of paper, in-boxes jammed with emails. People are drained and irritated and aren't getting their work done. The other time-waster is the weekend retreat, when people really want to be with their families instead of making nice with co-workers. Even if the conversation is exciting, a week later the participants are thinking, "You know, now that I've slept on it I realize that idea was really pretty stupid" or "Gosh, I just had a really valuable idea...wish I'd thought of it during the retreat. Oh well."

People can only stay focused on a tough issue for two hours at a time, which should be the limit of any meeting. Meetings on one topic shouldn't be too close to another, otherwise the ideas don't get a chance to soak in, nor should they be much more than a week apart, otherwise people forget or lose their enthusiasm. People will only tolerate four or five meetings on one topic before expecting results. The planning schedule has to fit these basic facts of human nature.

Chapter 5 lays out a 5-week planning schedule of one 2-hour meeting each week.

