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## ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a qualitative research study at three small independent colleges/universities on how literature-based strategic planning models compare with actual practices. Four critical aspects of strategic planning were identified: first, dealing with the future; second, understanding the organization's external environment; third, identifying current organizational strengths; and, fourth, using information gathered to make appropriate decisions. The study then focused on five institutional aspects of planning: (1) creation of strategic planning models; (2) how strategic planning is defined operationally; (3) planning activities used in the process; (4) the role of the institution's president; and (5) the outcomes, both intended and unintended, of the planning strategies. The research involved three steps: selecting the institutions, selecting interviewees, and acquiring data. The study showed that, generally, small institutions did not use strategic planning in a manner consistent with the literature, and also that all of them neglected to implement, or did so at a marginal level, the planning activities of providing on-going feedback regarding the status of plan implementation and evaluation of goal implementation and outcomes. Another finding was that while strategic planning was generally created in response to a management crisis, the degree of effort was generally a reflection of the president's commitment. The study concludes that while strategic planning is important, literature-based practices should be adapted to the needs of small colleges. Appendices list attributes of strategic planning and the interview questions. (Contains 39 references.) (CH)

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FACT OR FICTION: THE REVELANCE OF THE STRATEGIC  
PLANNING LITERATURE TO PLANNING PRACTICES AT SMALL  
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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## IDENTIFICATION OF THE ISSUES

For the past twenty-three years there has been an increasing amount written on how and why colleges and universities should do comprehensive strategic planning. Limited effort, however, has been given to basing such prescriptions for planning on research of the actual use of strategic planning in colleges and universities. As Schmidlein and Milton state:

Much of what has been written is prescriptive advocacy for a particular approach based on little or no systematic analysis of actual campus planning environments and experiences (Schmidlein & Milton, 1989, p. 5).

The purpose of this study has been to compare literature based postulates regarding why, what and how strategic planning is supposed to take place with actual planning practices. A qualitative research approach has been utilized to study three small independent colleges/universities in order to gain insight into current institutional practices. The focus of the study, derived from the literature, consists of **five key questions: (1) what leads to the creation of institutional strategic planning, (2) how does each institution operationally define strategic planning, (3) what planning activities are utilized in the process, (4) what role did the president of the institution have in that process, and (5) what are the outcomes of the planning process, intended and unintended, for the institution?**

Schendel and Hatten proposed the first application of strategic planning to higher education, stating that this form of planning would benefit higher education due to its ability to deal with change (Schendel & Hatten, 1972, p. 207). The literature since 1972 has typified the work of Schendel and Hatten, which focused on the value of doing strategic planning and how

such planning could be implemented in higher education. Authors such as Cope (1981), Peterson (1980), and Shirley (1983) have specialized in identifying or creating models of strategic planning which they believe appropriate to higher education. Baldrige and Okimi (1982), Keller (1983), and others have focused not only on how to plan, but the value of such planning and the political realities of its implementation. As stated earlier, much of this work is based on the authors' anecdotal descriptions of what colleges and universities should do in terms of planning, coupled with an awareness of the business planning research and literature.

What is strategic planning? Of the numerous definitions available, Marvin Peterson gives one of the most comprehensive. His definition of the process of strategic planning will serve as a good starting point for understanding the purpose of strategic planning. He describes strategic planning as:

...a conscious process by which an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment, identifies possible future states for itself, and then develops organizational strategies, policies, and procedures for selecting and getting to one or more of them. This definition views planning as a key organizational process that may or may not be developed as part of the larger institutional management function; and it assumes (1) that the institution and its members are concerned about the future as well as current states of the institution and the means for getting to them, (2) that they choose to develop a conscious planning process to reach these states rather than rely on the whims of key individuals or sporadic responses to unpredictable external events, and (3) that some attempt to assess institutional strengths and weaknesses and to examine the environment for constraints and opportunities that can lead to changes that are beneficial to the institution's vitality (Peterson, 1980, p. 114).

Four themes emerge from Peterson's definition: **(1) dealing with the future, (2) understanding the external environment the organization is part of, (3) identifying current organizational strengths, and (4) being able to use the information gathered in the first three themes to make appropriate decisions which promote the organization's prosperity.**

A review of the literature indicates a great deal of consistency in identifying these elements

as critical aspects of strategic planning ( Below, Morrisey, & Apcomb, 1987, pp. 9-12; Bryson, 1988, pp. 5-10; Cope, 1981, p. 2; Cyert, 1983, p. vii; Drucker, 1974, p. 125; Holloway, 1986, p. 16; Peterson, 1980, p. 114; Schmidlein & Milton, 1989; & Steiner, 1979, pp. 13-16). It is important to realize that these themes have been present in definitions of strategic planning from 1974 through the present, which indicates the congruity of thought over the last few years.

### Questions Defined

The following section provides an elaboration on each of the five main questions based on the perspective of theorists and researchers in the field of planning and higher education administration. Additionally, a postulated response to each of the questions drawn from the dominant themes in the literature is given.

(1) What leads to the creation of an institution-wide planning process?

Many, if not most, colleges or universities do not confront the need for formalized planning until issues become problems. By then, they realize there is much to be done in very little time on topics that involve many people and relations with a multiple of factors (Buchtel, 1980, p. 602).

George Keller identifies one of the biggest problems that was facing higher education during the eighties and is even larger today, when he states:

...a spectre is haunting higher education; the spector of decline and bankruptcy...American colleges and universities occupy a special, hazardous zone in society, between the competitive profit-making business sector and the government owned state run agencies...they are perpetually in search of vital financial nourishment (Keller, 1983, pp. 3-5).

Keller cites a 1981 study by the National Association of Colleges and University Business Officers which states that of the 3,100 institutions of higher education in America only 50 have endowments of \$100 million or more, and fewer than 200 have endowments of \$10 million or

more. This means that 2,900 colleges and universities are painfully dependent on tuition and development income (Keller, 1983, p. 152).

According to J.A. Guertin, small colleges and universities with student populations under 2,500 are in a state of peril and in danger of demise (Guertin, 1987, p.4). The Council of Independent Colleges called small colleges an obscure national asset. The Council reported that of 1,549 independent colleges and universities in the United States, 829 award a baccalaureate degree or higher. Of this figure 80 percent, or 650 are small independent colleges -ones that have an enrollment of 2,500 or fewer (Council of Independent Colleges, 1985).

Richard Jonsen aptly describes the challenges facing the small independent college in the eighties and does a very good job of foreshadowing the problems of the nineties. He describes six areas of concern; (1) changing, and in some cases declining, student demographic profile, (2) strident economic environment, (3) increasing demands for accountability and less interest in support from political leaders, (4) increased competition for students from all sectors of higher education, (5) the increasing complexity of the social environment for the traditionally homogeneous small college, and (6) the impact of technology on changing the way a school educates its students (Jonsen, 1984, p.177).

Jonsen concludes by maintaining that the most effective means for a small college to deal with these external challenges is to engage in strategic planning.

In the next ten years, no college will fail because the technical management capability is weak, but failures could occur through the unwillingness to undertake strategic planning, or through strategic planning errors. In the uncertain and difficult environment of the 1980's [and 1990's], strategic planning will involve major adjustments in the institutional courses that can assure a successful voyage into the twenty first century (Jonsen, 1984, p.182).

Internal issues also could bring about a crisis for an institution. Some of the potential

internal issues would be: a serious conflict or confusion among the members of an institution regarding the institutions's mission or core values (Hobbs & Cox, 1987); a mismatch between the college's financial status and commitment to new facilities, programs, or additional personnel; a failure in top management and/or the governing board (usually in the form of non-involvement) with goal setting, decision making, and accountability processes of the institution (Jonsen, 1979).

The potential crises listed, whether internal or external , are true for each institution only in theory. It would depend on the individual situation as to how much effect such things would have on any given school. But when considering the limited margin of failure available to the small private college, any of these issues which might instigate even a small change in the environment could bring about a crisis in a very short period of time. Thus, a probable precipitating factor in small independent institutions choosing to do extensive institutional planning is the advent of some crisis within the internal or external environment of organization.

A possible alternative reason for choosing to do strategic planning is to implement a comprehensive planning process for its own rational and logical merits. Such approaches to planning are typically linear and internally oriented. Rational models of planning are based on the belief that clear-cut goals and objectives can be established that would then be a part of a complete "cycle of activities" that would be self-assessing and self-correcting (Peterson, 1980, p. 127). Long-range planning is an approach to planning which is typical of such rational models. Long-range planning is the projection of future trends five to ten years in the future based on what is currently happening in the internal environment of the organization. Yet, as the research by Kelley and Shaw has suggested, few academic institutions base their strategic plans on a conceptual or strictly rational framework (Kelley & Shaw, 1987, pp. 319-336).

(2) How does each institution, in comparison to the literature, define strategic planning?

If an institution is engaging in strategic planning, using the literature as the basis of definition, logic dictates it would be participating in each of the four elements previously described. A question which arises is: to what degree does an institution need to participate in these elements for it to be called strategic planning? Is it possible for these four elements to exist on an informal level and yet be critical aspects of an institution's planning effort? When considering the definition of strategic planning, element four, making conscious timely decisions which promote the success of the organization could serve as a formal indication of the success of the other three elements. For example, if environmental scanning was taking place on a scaled down basis, yet providing some information which was useful in making strategic decisions, it could be surmised that the institution was operating a strategic planning process.

(3) What planning activities are utilized in the process?

In a ten organization study, R.G. Dyson and M.J. Foster (Dyson & Foster, 1983, pp. 69-70), attempted to assess the effectiveness of strategic planning. From there study thirteen activities were identified which typically are associated with strategic planning(see Appendix A). A great deal of consistency in proposed planning activities is found between the planning experts when comparing Dyson and Foster's list with the descriptions of strategic planning given by Bryson, Cope, Keller, Steiner, et. al.

The list of thirteen activities provides a good framework for discovering what activities and practices the institutions actually engaged in. The list also serves as a basis from which to make a comparison between what is gleaned through empirical exploration and what is prescribed in the planning literature. The general assumption is that each institution will have developed an



understanding of what activities are associated with strategic planning and have chosen those most appropriate for their use. The rationale being, that the institution's purpose for implementing strategic planning would determine which activities are implemented. Not every possible activity would be as relevant, given the contextual nature of institutional purposes. But those activities deemed most necessary to facilitate the accomplishment of institutional planning objectives would be included in the planning process and receive the greatest amount of time, resources, and focus.

(4) What role did the president of the institution have in the planning process? As Buchtel and others have indicated, of all the stakeholders who could have an impact on the utilization of institutional strategic planning, none is more critical than the President of the college/university (Buchtel, 1980, pp. 621-622; Cyert, 1981; & Millet, 1980, p. 504). The planning effort will be a strong reflection of the president's commitment to the process. Utilizing strategic planning processes to enable the institution to be responsive to the changes taking place in the environment may be one of the most critical responsibilities of the CEO (Steiner, 1969, pp. 74-75 & Levinson, 1981, p. 105). According to Baldrige and Okimi, no campus leader other than the president can take responsibility for institutional planning due to its overarching nature. External or internal groups may push for comprehensive planning but the president must serve as its guide in that he/she is the only person who has the authority and organizational perspective to do so (Baldrige & Okimi, 1982, p.17). Presidential assistants or other members of top management may be more involved in the day to day business of planning, but the premise of Baldrige and Okimi, Millet, Steiner, and others is that if there is any chance for actual change to occur, the planning process must reflect the CEO's point of view and be given his or her genuine approval and consistent participation.

(5) What are the outcomes, intended or unintended, of the strategic planning process?

The outcomes would seem to be related to the purpose(s) for which the institution instigated strategic planning. The thinking is that the actual activities utilized and the emphasis they receive will be a great determinant of what many of the outcomes will be. If the activities were selected and implemented for their compatibility with planning objectives, then it would be logical to consider planning purposes as the best indicator of outcomes.

Insight can be gained into the types of probable outcomes by examining the definition of strategic planning. As Robert Cope has stated: "Strategic planning is the making of a set of future determining decisions" (Cope, 1981, p. 23). If making future determining decisions is an outcome of the planning process, there will be behavioral changes or evidence of such decisions. Evidence of some of those changes would be new or clarified mission statements, changes in personnel, reallocation of funding, new marketing and/or fundraising programs, changes in institutional policies, creation of new programs, or ending of current programs. This is not an exhaustive list of changes, but brings out the point that strategic decision making should produce observable outcomes for it to be considered as having had an impact.

There may be outcomes which are not based on strategic decision making but resulting from the process or activity of planning (themes 1 through 3). These outcomes may not be as easily observable as those listed earlier but might have more to do with the perceptions of internal/external stakeholders or with institutional ethos. As suggested by George Keller, one of the outcomes of strategic planning could be the University and its' leaders taking on a more active role in determining the future of the institution (Keller, 1983, p. 143). Another potential outcome is a new concentration by all of the members of the institution on the fate of the organization (Keller, p. 150). This new concern for the success of the institution could be due to higher levels

of participation as a result of the planning process. An additional outcome related to more involvement by the campus community would be a greater sense of unity and teamwork. And with more teamwork and cooperation, more tolerance for divergent opinions and controversy could follow (Keller, p. 148).

In some instances, a strategic planning process may produce observable outcomes but not those needed (James, 1984, p. 58). Bean and Kuh identify situations in which superfluous issues are addressed, versus those which are critical to organizational success (Bean & Kuh, 1984, p. 40). An unintended outcome, but one that is a real possibility, is the disintegration of support for top management as a result of a failed planning endeavor. Along the same lines, another outcome could be antagonism toward top management because of the perception that they are doing this to the campus community in lieu of doing it with them. One more unintended outcome could be that the process has become a campus wide political wrestling match with each sector of the university fighting to protect its turf (Bean & Kuh, 1984, p. 42). A final outcome that must be considered is that the strategic planning process was too diffuse to produce any observable results due to a lack of clear objectives, implementation strategies, or expertise.

When analyzing planning outcomes, it is essential not to forget the role and impact the various stakeholder groups have in determining those outcomes. Decisions made as a result of the planning process will only be as consequential as there are people committed to implementing them. Based on the work of Mason, Mitroff, and Gray, it can be deduced that an implicit aspect of planning efforts resulting in observable changes (outcomes) is the role key decision makers and opinion leaders have in the process (Mason & Mitroff, 1981, pp. 13-14; Gray, 1986, pp. 91-92). Planning efforts developed without involving or, at least, considering the point of view of

important stakeholder groups could result in strategic decisions made on the basis of wishful thinking and are not likely to be implemented (Bennis, 1972, pp. 112-120).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Three major steps were taken in the implementation of this study. The initial step was to determine which institutions would be in the research sample. The second step involved selecting who would be interviewed at each school. And the final step focused on collecting information from each institution through structured interviews and retrieval of archival information and current documentation in order to establish a data base for analysis.

### **Selection of Institutions**

Only small independent not-for-profit colleges and universities from Southern California which had initiated or participated in a strategic planning process within recent years were considered for the study. Small college or university was defined as a four-year degree granting institution with less than 2,500 FTE, and having an endowment of under twenty million dollars at the time of the inception of its institutional planning efforts.

Contact was made with the institutions through conversations with the President or the Assistant to the President. In those cases where the initial contact was with the Assistant to the President, the President of the institution was brought into the discussion for his/her approval before further steps were taken. A presentation was given to the initial contact person and included the intent of the study, the specific steps involved, who in the institution would be asked to participate, the amount of time required of participants, the questions which would be asked,

and the documents requested. A research proposal describing the importance of the study, the conceptual framework of the research, the research design, and research questions were made available to each contact person.

### Selection of Interviewees

Five individuals were interviewed at each institution, including the President, Academic Vice President, and a senior faculty member. The remaining two interviewees represented a mix of Assistants to the President, Chief Financial Officers, and Chief Student Affairs Officers. The selection of interviewees was based on a number of factors. Individuals were asked to participate if they had direct involvement in the planning process and had served, or were still serving, as a member of the coordinating planning group for their institution. Direct involvement with planning by those interviewed was essential in order for them to provide informed responses to the questions about specific planning purposes, activities, and genesis of the effort. The interviewees' level of involvement with coordinating and facilitating planning varied from complete involvement, which was the case for many of the Presidents, to only periodic involvement which was true for the faculty members.

Interviewees were sought who had extended experience with their institution's planning efforts, yet individuals with short term experience also were interviewed to provide a more recent and fresh perspective. An attempt was made at each institution to identify the most appropriate and balanced group to interview. The goal was to interview individuals with direct experience and responsibility for strategic planning and those who could provide differing perspectives representing key sectors of the institution.

### Data Acquisition

According to Robert K. Yin (1985) there are six different sources of evidence that can be the focus of data collection for case studies: (1)documentation, (2)archival records, (3)interviews, (4)direct observation, (5)participant-observation and (6)physical artifacts. Of those six, three were utilized: documentation, archival records and interviews. Of the three research tools applied, none was more critical in data acquisition than focused interviewing. Each interviewee was presented with a set of pre-determined questions which focused upon the five main questions of the study along with additional questions aimed at establishing the history of planning at the institution (See Appendix B).

The types and quantity of documentation and archival records procured from each institution varied. A list of potential information sources was established prior to actual data collection. Once on campus, collection of written materials went beyond the pre-determined list of materials to include any source of information that could add to the base of information. Following is a list of the types of documentation and archival records provided by the interviewees and their institutions (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

#### DOCUMENTATION AND ARCHIVAL RECORD ITEMS

1. College Catalogs
2. Institutional Factbooks
3. Admissions Materials
4. Student Handbooks
5. Internal memorandums regarding planning
6. Institutional Planning Source Books
7. Grant Proposals
8. Agendas for planning meetings
9. Institutional Goals Statements
10. Institutional Self-Studies

11. Thought papers written by the interviewees on planning
12. Planning forms
13. Articles, chapters, and other materials on planning reviewed by the institutions in the development of the planning process
14. Institutional Long Range and Strategic Plans
15. Timelines for planning activities
16. Organizational Charts

The documentation and archival records helped to corroborate the interviewees' responses and to supplement data gathering. This was particularly true of developing institutional histories and establishing the chronology of planning efforts. An important aspect of the data base compiled in this study is that it has not been drawn from just one source of information. When combined, the three different sources of evidence have helped to create a more robust perspective of institutional planning efforts.

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on a review of the planning literature, a definition of strategic planning was established and hypothesized response(s) were developed for each of the five key questions. The following are the findings and related implications of the research.

### **Question # 1: On a functional level, how have the Colleges defined strategic planning?**

The results indicated that in general, institutions did participate in strategic planning in a manner consistent with the literature based definition. However, the institutions organized their planning efforts differently and gave components varying degrees of attention and energy. At each of the colleges, the majority of effort to facilitate the type of planning activities described in the definition was given during the early years of the planning effort. As decisions were made

and changes enacted which addressed the goals of planning, the focus and usage of some activities declined.

### **Implications of the Findings**

In general, the four key components of strategic planning were implemented. Yet, the question remains if the planning literature provided an accurate description of the combined effect of such activities for each institution? Such combined effects should produce results typified by Steiner's (1979) call for a new, more contemplative way of thinking about the institution and its future or result, in the linkage of internal planning, resource allocation, and evaluation systems, with strategic plans driving the system (Steiner, 1979 & Bryson, 1988). Such combined effects also could result in overt styles or patterns of organizational functioning as outlined by Taylor (1987), or in the implementation of strategic planning at all levels of the institution as prescribed by Kotler and Murphy (1981). Have the institutions changed their pattern of functioning to conform with a comprehensive planning approach as described by the planning experts? The findings suggest that the institutions, though matching with the general definition of strategic planning, have adapted such planning methodologies to their needs, on-going management and decision making processes, and organizational culture, results which seem to concur with the research of Schmidlein and Milton. Their work indicates that institutions do find planning concepts beneficial, if planning is an integral part of on-going decision making, and not a separate formal activity (Schmidlein & Milton, 1990, p.93). The finding beyond the finding is that none of the institutions' planning efforts is a mirror image of the total expression of strategic planning as put forth in the prescriptive literature.



## QUESTION # 2: What planning activities were utilized in the College's planning efforts?

Many of the planning activities utilized by the institutions corresponded with Dyson and Foster's (1983) list of activities. The findings demonstrated that all the institutions neglected to implement, or did so at a marginal level, the planning activities of providing on-going feedback regarding the status of plan implementation and evaluation of goal implementation and outcomes. (See Table 2 below). Living out of "control measures", described by Dyson and Foster, was not essential for planning to be productive. But the findings from one of the institutions suggested that the lack of attention to such measures was a contributing factor in the rigidification of formal institutional planning efforts.

Table 2

### INSTITUTIONAL UTILIZATION OF PLANNING ACTIVITIES

<u>Fully Utilized</u>	<u>Limited Utilization</u>	<u>Not Utilized</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Setting goals and objectives</li> <li>-Empirical data &amp; research was utilized in analysis...</li> <li>-Feasibility of doing planning was considered</li> <li>-Scanning the external environment</li> <li>-Assessed internal strengths and weaknesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Considered alternative futures</li> <li>-Facilitated strategic thinking in all sectors of the College</li> <li>-Process allowed for timely and appropriate modifications</li> <li>-Process included members from all sectors of the college</li> <li>-Establish feedback mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evaluation measures and stated outcomes established at the outset</li> </ul>

### Implications of the Findings

The findings also suggest that strategic planning is not a static entity even though it is consistently associated with certain elements and activities. Strategic planning is a tool, or set of procedures, that can be used to varying degrees for different purposes. The nature of its usage is not predetermined, as

suggested by some of the models in the prescriptive planning literature. The actual nature of institutional planning appears to be a product of a combination of factors: first, the purposes of those who implement this tool; second, the external and internal environmental realities; third, the planning participants and the agendas and perspectives they bring to the process; and finally, the scope, intensity and type of planning activities that are actually implemented.

### **Question #3 What led to the creation of institutional strategic planning?**

The findings were mixed, with strong indication that for two of the institutions, strategic planning was implemented as a response by management to crisis. The third institution's reason for planning was indicative of the alternative hypothesis, which is that institutions will choose to plan even when not facing crisis because planning is a logical and rational means of promoting organizational growth and dealing with the future.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings indicate that the leadership of colleges do plan because of crises and that they will choose to plan in times of relative strength because of planning's perceived value in promoting institutional vitality. These results also indicate that a more complete explanation of the college's behavior towards planning is needed.

A more comprehensive accounting of the action in regards to planning is, that crisis forces the focus of attention and energies on defined areas of concern. When a crisis does not exist, a condition of "slack resources" results, enabling the college and its leadership to have a wider latitude of ways in which it can resolve less demanding problems and go about decision making. James March (1982) elaborates on the theory of slack resources by stating:

The key scarce resource is attention, and theories of limited rationality are, for the most part,

theories of the allocation of attention. They are also theories of organizational slack. When aspirations are achieved, search for new alternatives is assumed to be modest, slack accumulates and aspirations rise. Conversely, when performance falls below aspiration, search is stimulated, slack is decreased, and aspirations decline. These changes in aspirations, search, and slack tend to keep performance and aspiration reasonably close, and the process serves to buffer the organization somewhat from fluctuations in the environment (March, 1982, pp.53-54).

An institution's attention to strategic planning appears to be related to the accumulation or decline of organizational slack. Strategic planning is a tool the leadership of an organization uses to deal with its institution's state of organizational slack. Declining slack requires greater attention and focus of energies on specific areas of concern, and strategic planning is a useful mechanism to focus attention and energy. The greater the amount of organizational slack, the less the demand for concentrating attention and centralizing decision making, thus strategic planning becomes more optional, and, if implemented, more of an "interpretive" process typical of Ellen Chaffee's description of the resilient college (Chaffee, 1984).

These premises are evidenced in the research sample. Two of the institutions were in a state of crises and needed to search for solutions and new alternatives. These schools utilized strategic planning as a means for focusing their attention and energies on those needs. The school reflecting the alternative hypothesis implemented planning less focused on specific concerns. Its goals for planning were a combination of focusing potential loss of organizational slack (enrollment and finances) while also striving to increase slack by introducing new techniques and collective meaning to their experience. This institution is indicative of an organization with accumulated slack, increased aspirations and a minimal need to focus attention and energy. Further evidence of this minimal need to focus attention and energy was

demonstrated by the loosely organized and connected way in which planning processes were designed and implemented over time. The greater the organizational slack the more open ended the planning process became.

#### **Question #4 What role did the Presidents play in the planning process?**

The hypothesis that an institution's strategic planning efforts will be a reflection of the President's commitment and involvement to planning was found to be true. The Presidents of the small colleges in the study had the singularly most important role in their institutions planning efforts. The findings indicate that planning efforts are reflective of Presidential commitment and that Presidential participation in planning activities was perceived as necessary for the effort to be viewed by campus community as having validity and consequence. At each of the institutions, the creation, development, implementation of activities, and impact of the planning process, was directly affected by the President. Presidential support was essential if any strategic planning was to take place.

What was not completely supported by the findings was the notion, as proposed by Baldrige and Okimi (1982), that the President must lead the planning effort. The results from one of the institutions demonstrated that the President could function as an active participant of planning without assuming a leading role in implementing planning activities. The President must demonstrate commitment to the process and its outcomes by upholding the decisions made by the planning group if implementation was to occur. These results substantiate Millet's (1980) point that how the President functions as chief planner has gone beyond just the President, even at a small college, to being an effort of the President and his/her managerial associates. Even though the President has not coordinated the process, the planning effort was still located with the President's office and could be viewed as an extension of Presidential effort and direction.

An additional finding was that Presidents were able to live out their roles as chief planners with minimal input or involvement from their Board of Trustees. None of the Boards were actively engaged in key decision making during times of crisis, or had significant input into the goals of planning efforts. Also, it appears the Boards did little to evaluate the President's ability as chief planner.

The planning literature describes the President as being central to planning efforts, yet the higher education literature on planning and the president (Birnbaum, 1988; Cope, 1981; Keller, 1983; Millet, 1980; Walker, 1979) fell short of projecting the dominant role the Presidency had in planning at colleges in this study. The quotation given below is indicative of the role many planning and organizational experts expect the President to fill.

The picture of the president as the guiding genius behind all consecutive gains and directional purpose in an institution is based on unreal perception of how campuses function. Of course the president is and should be an important part of the process of change. But campuses simply do not change permanently in response to decisions and the will of a single person (Walker, 1979, p. 118).

It may be debatable whether each President in the study was a guiding genius, but they were the dominant source of decision making, institutional direction setting, and the fulcrum for institutional change. The pervasive role of the Presidency in planning at the small independent tuition driven institution appears to be more reflective of the business literature on planning, where the CEO is often depicted as the captain of the ship at the rudder guiding the organization, versus the description of the President as a politician incrementally working toward institutional consensus on direction and priorities.

#### **Question #5 What have been the outcomes of strategic planning intended and unintended?**

The results support the hypothesis that planning outcomes will be linked to the original purposes for which strategic planning was implemented. At each institution activities were facilitated that addressed the purposes for planning. The second postulate, that a major outcome of strategic planning is institutional

shaping decisions, was supported by the research findings. The third postulate, that top management will be viewed as increasing in action toward establishing the future of the institution, was supported. The fourth postulate was not clearly substantiated. George Keller (1983) stated that strategic planning should produce an increased awareness of the fate of the school by planners and the University community in general. This was true for the two colleges that initiated planning as a response to crises, but was not an outcome for the institution which instituted planning as a logical next step in its growth. The final hypothesis also was not supported by the findings. Keller, Cope and others have proposed that for strategic planning to be successful it must be participatory, including top management, but other key leaders on campus as well, who could bring political weight to the implementation of planning decisions (Cope, 1989 & Keller, 1983). For one of the institutions, inclusion of campus members outside of top management in key planning and decision making sessions was a rare occurrence. At the other institutions there was a greater degree of participation, but top managers, mostly the Presidents, dominated planning without significant participation in critical elements of the planning processes. There was some criticism from the faculty at all of the institutions about their lack of involvement and role in decision making, but such concerns had not led to political emphases which could stop the implementation of plans made by the President and his/her management group.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings indicate a disparity in the proposed need for broad based participation in planning efforts if they are to be productive. The findings could indicate that the planning experts have not taken into account the organizational realities of the small college. Such realities as the proximity of the small college President to the rest of the institution via flat organizational hierarchies, or the centralized nature of decision making due to the limited size of budgets, coupled with the constant press of external realities,

and the culture and norms of small colleges in relation to how and who will make decisions, have not been taken into account.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### **Overall, how reflective of actual planning practices is the prescriptive planning literature?**

The assumption portrayed in the literature is that institutional strategic planning is a comprehensive process which will be implemented in its entirety with wide spread involvement, linkage of decision making, resource allocation and evaluation procedures. Strategic planning is viewed in the literature as a continuous process which produces rationally agreed upon goals to be implemented on all levels of the institution with all of these elements resulting in a new, more strategic way of thinking by the campus community. These assumptions were not supported by this research. **There were no givens in actual planning practice, as suggested by the literature, as to the nature of planning.** Demands on the institution determined by internal capabilities and external pressures, coupled with presidential direction and vision, established the nature of institutional planning. As these things changed so did the focus and nature of institutional planning.

Many of the specific elements and activities of strategic planning, however, as described by the literature were utilized for institutional purposes. This finding indicates that the literature represents a potentially useful collection or menu of techniques which could assist with various challenges such as adapting to external realities, internal issues and providing a means for institutional leadership to pursue organizational development. The literature did reflect the focus the institutions gave to using strategic planning methods to orient themselves to the external environment. The literature also corroborated the

use of planning techniques to assess internal realities and capabilities. The literature was valid in its prescription for strategic planning as a means for decision making. Indeed, each of the schools' planning efforts resulted in key decisions at some point in the planning process. Strategic planning methods also have been helpful in keeping the institutions aware of market realities and competition as described by Kotler and Murphy (1981).

Many planning activities identified as endemic to strategic planning were not reflected in a significant way in institutional practice. Consistent wide spread involvement or input from the campus community was not the norm. Formal evaluation and feedback methodologies received minimal attention. Facilitating strategic thinking in all sectors of the institution was not a high priority. **As stated previously, the literature has understated the role of the President in small independent college planning.** The meaning for the institutions in this study was that strategic planning provided an array of techniques to assist in prioritization of institutional issues, related goal setting and decision making.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that planning is not a stand alone function. Viewing strategic planning as only one part of organizational life in a small college will provide a more informed perspective on the role of planning in decision making. Additionally, the planning experts need to move beyond their predominant frame of reference based on large public and private institutions, to consider what is effective practice in the small private colleges. Given the challenges and the impact of small private colleges in higher education, it will be time well spent.



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## APPENDIX A

### THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. **Clear statements of objectives:** The planning system will focus on objectives, clarify them and keep them in mind throughout the planning process.
2. **Strategic decision making based on integration of plans and analysis:** Plans and analysis are the focus of strategic decision making for the organization.
3. **Planners facilitate the action of others:** Planners facilitate strategic thinking in all participants in the planning process.
4. **A wide range of possible futures are considered:** The planning system will provide many alternatives not just one singular future.
5. **Multiple measures are used to evaluate the process:** Many relevant measures including financial and other appropriate indicators will be used in evaluating the planning process.
6. **The uncertainty of the external environment is assessed:** Marketing trends, the economic environment, costs for running organizations, and other exogenous variables must be considered during the strategic planning process.
7. **Internal resources are assessed:** Internal organizational strengths are identified along with resources needed to implement strategic decisions.
8. **Adequate data is made available:** Sufficient data is required in order to avoid unnecessary approximation, and just enough data to avoid information overload and confusion.
9. **The planning process will allow for appropriate and timely modifications:** As the planning process evolves, attention will be given to readjusting goals and objectives as the planners become aware of new issues, data indicating a need for change in direction or scope, and as current goals and objectives are met.
10. **Assumptions are stated explicitly so that unrealistic and inconsistent assumptions can be avoided:** Assumptions about what is explicitly expected of the planning process are identified, realistic expectations are developed which take into consideration the current capabilities of the organization and those desired as a result of decisions made because of the planning process.
11. **Goals will be quantified when appropriate, and qualitative goals will be recognized:** Where appropriate, goals will be stated in terms of observable change and qualitative goals will be identified as documented.
12. **Establish feedback mechanisms:** Communication links will be established that inform planners as to what is resulting from the implementation of strategic planning decisions.
13. **Feasibility of implementing planning elements will be assessed and hurdles to the process negotiated:** Barriers to the implementation of planning decisions will be identified and avoided, removed, or accepted with planning decisions changed as a result (Dyson & Foster, 1983, pp. 69-70).

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUSED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### A. Why Plan?

1. What led to the creation of a strategic planning process at your institution?
2. Were there any external problems or crises which prompted doing strategic planning, e.g.:
  - Small endowment
  - Tightening of financial aid support
  - Dwindling enrollment
  - Increased competition from other schools
3. Were there any internal crises or concerns which prompted doing strategic planning, e.g.:
  - A conflict or confusion regarding institutional mission
  - Over-commitment of financial resources for new facilities, programs, or personnel;  
example.
  - Lack of leadership by top management or the Board
4. Did the college choose to plan because of its logical value, e.g.:
  - Using strategic planning as a mechanism to create the type of college you want it to be five years down the road, i.e., clarify institutional values and desired outcomes.
  - Using the planning process to strengthen goal setting and evaluation methods;  
example.
  - Developing better communication and teamwork on campus

#### B. How Has the Institution Defined Strategic Planning?

1. What was the expressed purpose (specific goals) for doing strategic planning? (See planning documents).
2. What were the key elements of your planning process, e.g.:
  - A systematic assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses
  - Assess the external environment for what impact it is or could have on your institution, e.g., marketing research, local economic trends, donor prospects, staffing trends, etc.
  - Using the information gained to make timely and appropriate decisions affecting the future of the school.

#### C. What Was the Nature of the Process?

1. What planning activities were utilized in your strategic planning process, e.g.:
  - An intentional focus on setting clear objectives and goals
  - Facilitated strategic thinking in all sectors of the University

The planning process included members from all parts of the institution  
Empirical data/research was used in analysis and decision making  
The planning process allowed for timely and appropriate modifications  
The feasibility of doing strategic planning was considered before any planning activities were initiated.

Evaluation measures-stated outcomes of success were established at the onset of planning; what were they?

2. Who was in charge of determining the actual structure (planning activities) of the planning process?
3. On what basis were the planning activities selected?
4. What role have you had in the planning effort?
5. How long have you been involved in the planning process? With the institution?
6. How involved did you feel in the planning process? Do you think your involvement was important? Explain.

D. What Role Has the President had in the Planning Process?

1. How involved has the President been in the planning process, e.g.:
  - Of involvement
  - Communicated the need for planning
  - Input into the goals and objectives of the process
  - Retained planning experts
  - Assisted in the selection of planning models
  - Worked with the Board on the direction and funding of planning efforts
  - Made critical decisions as a result of the planning process; e.g.:
    - Acquired support for the planning process from important opinion leaders and groups, e.g., faculty, local government.
    - Gave updates to the institution on how the process was going
    - Other
2. What impact did the President's involvement (or lack thereof) have on the planning process?

E. Planning Outcomes

1. What were the outcomes of the planning process, e.g.:
  - A greater awareness and focus on the fate of the school
  - New programs and personnel; example
  - Budgeting and the strategic prioritization and decision making process are closely linked.
  - Policy changes; examples
  - Changes or reclarification of Mission
  - More information shared with campus community

A greater sense of teamwork or campus unity; describe  
Higher levels of participation in planning efforts  
More awareness of who your comparative schools are, knowledge of what they  
are doing.  
Reduction in programs and personnel; example  
Top management seen as being more active and involved  
Better relationships with the Board and/or community  
Other

2. Were there any unintended outcomes of the planning process, e.g.:  
Process produced results but not those needed; example  
Process never resulted in strategic decision making; describe  
Planning efforts were too ambiguous and vague  
Disintegration of support for leadership of planning process  
Increased campus politics and protecting of turf  
Resentment of leaders because the process was done on people and not with them
3. Based on your vantage point (position and role) in the institution, what were the most useful and non-useful outcomes of the planning process? (Did it do what you had hoped?).
4. What would you want to see changed in the school's planning efforts?
5. Is strategic planning important to your institution? Should the institution continue such efforts?

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