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ABSTRACT

In the face of reduced resources, increased levels of competition, and rapid technological advancement, it is critical that colleges learn how to plan for the future. There are four main phases of effective planning: development, implementation, evaluation of results (audit), and standardization. The Hoshin Planning model, which incorporates these four phases, is designed to help organizations develop plans based on their unique situations and include input from all concerned parties. The first step of the model involves the formation of a cross-sectional planning group composed of college administrators, support staff, faculty, students, and other customers. Next, the organization's leadership should help develop a vision to guide planning and indicators and baseline data should be developed to gauge progress toward that vision. The group should then clarify the college mission and determine the critical processes used to fulfill that mission. The next steps involve the identification of trends, college customers and their needs, and college potential. Once this information is gathered, broad goals should be developed for the next 3 to 5 years and implementation should begin, including the development of targets and departmental means that reflect organizational goals. Finally, the evaluation phase should examine the effectiveness of the process in terms of how customers' needs were met. Contains 30 references. (BCY)

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Doing Effective Strategic Planning in a Higher Education Environment

James B. Rieley

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Doing Effective Strategic Planning in a Higher Education Environment

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Planning in education is thought by many to be something that we just don't need to do. Hardly. As Yogi Berra is purported to have said, "when you come to a fork in the road, take it." That is where planning in education is today. Education is always invariably at a fork in the road and undoubtedly will take it. Unfortunately for the customers of many educational institutions, the choice of direction at the fork is made by guesswork at best.

In the past thirty years, planning in education has changed dramatically. The 1960's saw times of growth in technical and community colleges in this country. It was a time in which public financing was readily available, and we were responding to very clearly defined needs. The next decade signaled the beginning of colleges looking to business and industry for planning models. It was the time when "MBO went to college." In the 1980's, long range planning shifted toward strategic planning, and again college's looked to the business community for direction in planning.

Now it is the 1990's, and the educational world has changed. College's of all types are faced with the same issues facing business and industry. These challenges include the reduced availability of resources, increasingly high levels of competition, and increasing demands from customers for accountability. A recent study stated that in the next fifty years, the population of the world will double (Pritchett, 1993). At this same time, technology will continue to accelerate. Pritchett states, "Eighty percent of our technological inventions have occurred just since 1900. It is predicted that within the last fifteen years of the twentieth century we will see as much technological change as there was in the first eighty five years. According to the book, *Information Anxiety*, "the fund of information available to us doubles every five years." To be able to deal effectively with such a dynamic environment, we will need to be able to break the educational barriers of how we were taught to think, to move into an innovative thinking mode. Educational institutions are finally beginning to address the issue of quality and effectiveness as strategies to meet these challenges.

Nancy Austin, at a recent presentation stated, "The first principle of management is that the driving force for the development of new products is not technology, not money, but the imagination of people." This statement has applicability not only for the development of new products, but encourages education to develop methods to meet the increasing demands of customers, including students and other customers. There are many institutions in this country who have the latest in technology, even some who have deep financial pockets. However, there is not a single institution who will be able to develop a plan of how it can move forward to meet the challenges of the next 10 - 20 years without innovative people. People are very clearly the most important asset of any organization, whether educationally based or not. It is people who are an educational institution, not the buildings, not the computer labs, nor the classrooms.

To become effective, we must learn how to plan. Not just plan for the literal tomorrow, but plan for the figurative tomorrow. We must learn to plan for the year 2000 and beyond. There are many organizations who are currently developing plans that are titled, "something something something for the year 2000." Great! Unfortunately, just putting "2000" on the cover of the plan won't do much to ensure that the organization will still be viable in that year. We need to carefully look at how we do the planning, not how we design planning documents. If we do not develop a plan of how to survive until the year 2000, there is little hope of accomplishing it.

In her book, *Whole Earth Models and Systems*, Donella Meadows states, "We think that because we understand one, we should be able to understand two, because one and one make two." Of course, just because we understand the concept of one does not mean that we will understand the concept of two. To understand the concept of two, we need to understand the concept of the word and. And is a linkage, a connector. It provides the linkage between one and one. When we begin to understand the concept of and, we can begin to understand the outcome of linking *one and one*. This concept

does not only apply to mathematics, it applies to planning. Educational institutions need to understand the importance of the linkages required to ensure that plans developed will be able to address the challenges facing them in the future, as well as understand how people fit into the long range plan.

This paper will put forth the issues that relate to planning, as well as articulate a continuous loop planning process that works. There are four main elements of effective planning: the development of the plan phase; the implementation phase; the audit phase; and the standardization phase. These phases reflect the steps of the Shewart Cycle. Similar in concept to one developed by John Dewey, the Shewart Cycle delineates the four steps required for effective planning. Referenced for years by Dr. W. Edwards Deming, the Shewart Cycle is also known as the PDCA cycle. The four steps are plan, do, check, act. These four steps give an institution the ability to link the development of an effective planning process to positive organizational outcomes. PDCA has application on any level, from the development of major organizational initiatives or individual departmental improvement plans.

The planning process that I will put forth follows a model that has become recognized for its ability to help an organization move effectively toward its future. The model, Hoshin Planning, is a process that enables an organization to develop a plan that is based on the factual reality of a situation, a process that values the input of everyone concerned, a process that articulates a viable implementation path for the future. In his new book, Joe Colletti calls this process "focused planning." This title is very accurate, for the process gives an organization the ability to focus its planning efforts on what is truly important, not on what is politically "hot."

Planning Phase

Planning is a responsibility of everyone, for it is everyone who will be on the journey into the future. Therefore, it will be critical for everyone to be able to have input as to how to get there. In most institutions, having everyone involved in the actual planning can become very unwieldy, so the cross-sectional group is used. This group should consist of a cross-sectional representation of the college population. This will include administration, support staff, faculty, students, and other customers of the college. This means that planning for the future of the college should not be left up to just those who have the word planning on their door. If the college has a population of represented employees, they need to be included as well. The key to a group working together on the planning process is facilitation.

Before the group convenes for the first time, a facilitator shall need to be assigned to the planning process. This facilitator must have extensive training in both team development, as well as quality improvement planning tools. It will be the responsibility of the facilitator to keep the group moving forward in the planning process and to keep the group focused on the necessary issues that will result in a plan for both the short and long-term future of the college. Once a facilitator has been appointed, the group should meet. This initial meeting should be one of familiarization only. In this first session, the beginnings of team formation, the group will need to introduce themselves, develop ground rules for future meetings, and have an overview of the planning process itself. It is not until the next meeting that the planning itself begins.

Vision

Planning is a function of leadership. Without effective leadership, there will be no need for a college to do planning. This is because without leadership, there will eventually be no college. Leadership is something that gives a college the ability to determine where it wants to go in the future. A function of leadership is the articulation of the vision for a college. This does not mean that the leader of a college must supply the vision; it only means that the leader must be able to define what that vision means to everyone in the organization. Too often a vision is developed that is not quite clear, it does not provide everyone the ability to see it. It is a responsibility of the leader to be able to make the vision clear, to be able to define exactly what the vision means for all. This means that the leader must help facilitate an understanding of the vision to provide an opportunity for alignment and commitment from the entire college population. The vision itself can be developed by a group charged with planning.

Indicators of Movement

After the development of the vision, the next step in the planning process is the determination of what indicators will signal movement toward that vision. The indicators can be equated to sign posts along the way. These indicators will become a crucial element in the planning process, for without indicators of progress toward the vision, it will be impossible to measure any progress. The indicators are developed through a process known as the affinity process. In the affinity process, the planning group brainstorms all the indicators that they can identify. These outputs are written onto post-its in a format of 3 - 5 words, and need to contain a verb. The verb is important, for movement toward the vision requires action, and, therefore, an action word can better identify what the indicator will look like. Once the group has identified as many indicators as possible, the outputs are sorted into themes. These themes are groups of indicators that have some affinity to each other. The group then develops a title or header card for each theme. The header, also in a 3 - 5 word with verb format, is a reflection of all the indicators in each theme. Although only the header cards initially continue to be used, the entire output is saved both as documentation, and for later use.

Development of Baseline

The next step in the planning process is to determine how the college is doing now moving toward its vision. For this determination, the process uses a tool known as an arachnid chart. This tool gets its name for its visual similarity to a spider's web. Again, the process begins with the header cards from the affinity process question of what are the indicators of movement toward the vision. The cards should be placed in the same locations as they were for the interrelationship digraph. This is for the purpose of continuity in process, as well as helping the achievement of alignment within the participants on the outcome. Lines are drawn from the center of the chart to each header card. These lines appear as radial lines or spokes on a wheel.

Mission

Clarification of the college mission is important, for the mission is a statement of why the college exists. This is different than the vision (a statement of future condition). In many colleges, the mission statement is an accumulation of many things; a mission, a vision, a rationale for delivery education, a listing of what the delivery methods are; the list goes on and on. The mission is only a statement of purpose. The purpose is why there is a college, why the college exists. Like the vision, the mission statement should be short and clear, usually in the 10 - 15 word range. The mission statement itself should not try to define the parameters of the mission, the how, only the why.

With both the vision and mission defined, the next step is working to begin achieving alignment throughout the college. This is accomplished through a process known as catchball. Catchball is nothing more than putting the statements out to the college populations for input. The question to be asked at this point is, "Are you comfortable with the vision of the college; are you comfortable with the mission of the college?" If the responses are highly positive, the process continues; if the responses are negative or not largely positive, the planning group must relook at what it has done to that point. When asking the question of comfort with the vision and mission, effort must be taken to ask for input if the respondents are not comfortable. This input should be used by the group if the catchball process shows lack of alignment.

Critical Processes

With the mission established or clarified, it is key to define how the college achieves its mission. This is done through looking at what the critical processes are that the college uses to meet the needs of its customers. The critical processes, usually in the 6 to 8 range, are defined as "the steps the college uses on an ongoing basis" to meet the needs of the customers. The processes should begin with initial or pre-customer contact, and end with some sort of educational follow-up.

Determination of Trends

When the process continues, the next step is to begin accumulating data regarding the trends affecting the college. These will be important in the planning process to help establish the groundwork for how the college can move forward. The trends in question include: human resource, financial, environmental, technology, market, and regulatory. These trends should be brainstormed by the group with prior notice to ensure that the appropriate information is available for the process.

Customer Identification

The trend determination is followed by a listing of all the customers of the college. This listing need not be by name, but by customer group. Again, the listing of customers is a foundational step in planning for how to meet those customers needs. Customer groups should include the direct customers of the college, the internal customers of the college, and the indirect customers of the college. Ranking the customers is not important, but ensuring that all customer groups have been identified is.

Determination of Customer Needs

The planning group then should go to those customers to find out what their needs are. Asking the customers what they need seems logical, but in many cases, this is not done. The only person who truly knows what he or she needs is the customer, so they need to be asked. It will obviously be impossible to ask all the customers, but it is not unreasonable to pose the question to representatives of each customer group. The question can be presented in various forms, including direct response questions, survey instruments, and/or focus group meetings. At the same time the needs are determined, it is important for the customers to rate the importance of their needs. This is done most effectively through focus group meetings. All the needs are listed, with the attending population given the opportunity to rate them as to importance.

Process/Needs Relationship Development

Through the use of a matrix, the relationship between the critical processes and the customer needs can be graphically shown. This is for the purpose of determining which process has the strongest impact on meeting the customers needs. Again, the use of a quality improvement tool helps to achieve clarity in the development of the process, giving everyone involved the ability to see the same picture.

Development of College Potentials

The next step in the planning process is the determination of the college's abilities. This is done through the affinity process, with the question being, "what are the strengths and weaknesses of the college?" Prior to the sorting process, continue the process with the additional question, "what are the college's opportunities in the future and the threats to those opportunities?" The normal affinity process rules apply with the outcome yielding themes with header cards. As before, the header cards are then duplicated for an interrelationship digraph. This outcome gives the group additional focus and clarity on what needs to be done in the future.

Planning What Needs to Be Done

Up to this point, most of the work of the planning group has been focussed on the establishment of information to enable the group to develop the plan. This is where the planning begins. The initial focus of the actual planning is on the long-range plan. In many organizations, what is looked at initially is the one-year plan. This is clearly a mistake.

Developing a plan for one year is the same as saying “on our next vacation let’s travel four hundred miles and then see where we are.” Most of us would rather say, “this is where we are going. Let’s figure out where we need to be by the end of the first day of travel if we are to complete the trip on time.”

This is long-range planning, and from this comes the plan for each part of that journey. In the case of a college, what is best is to focus on what needs to be done in the next 3 - 5 years. These “things that need to be done” are specifics that will help the college move toward the vision. The tool for this process is the affinity process. However, prior to the usual affinity sort, a sort is done chronologically.

Sorting and Driver Determination

The chronological sort will break the specifics into groups of things to be done or begun in the first year, things done or begun in the second year, etc. The header cards for this sort should be marked “year 1”, “year 2”, etc. Then, the post-its in year one are then resorted based on affinity. This resort will yield specific themes that need to be addressed in the next year. This is the first year of a multi-year plan. In comparable terms, it would equate to the first part of a long journey toward a favorable destination. It is the first part of the journey that sets the direction for the entire journey. The themes represented on header cards are then duplicated for an interrelationship digraph, with the driving elements becoming visible. It is those driving elements that become the goals for the first years plan. These elements should be looked at as breakthroughs in the way the college works to satisfy its mission.

It is important to note that in the first year of doing planning in this manner, it is not unusual to have the first years goals seem very high level and organizationally wide. This may cause some concern among the planners. Traditionally, when planning, we want to get right to the meat, the “hot” operational goals. Unfortunately, this can be a mistake. Prior to being able to deal effectively with operational issues, an organization must deal with the overall issues that effect the organization as a whole. These may include issues such as organizational culture or behaviors.

These issues may seem somewhat intangible and hard to measure, but that is not the case. The key to being able to measure something is establishing the baseline of where the organization is at that point in time. Through the use of the tools mentioned, either movement or non-movement can be shown. The key point is that these global, organizational issues are prerequisites to doing the operational issues. The operational issues usually appear in subsequent years.

Force-Field Analysis

The breakthrough goals will not be small, detailed objectives. They will be large themes that can, if implemented effectively truly change the organization. They give the college the opportunity to dramatically improve the way in which it delivers education. That is what colleges need today to meet the challenges of the future. However, sometimes the breakthrough goals will not be easy to implement. For this reason it is important to determine what will be the driving and restraining forces that will affect this implementation. The tool that helps to make this determination is a force-field analysis. The forces that will drive the implementation are listed on the left side of a flip chart, and the restraining forces are listed on the right side. The object of this process is to make visible all the issues that will assist or hinder the implementation of a goal or goals. This gives the planning team the ability to further focus on how to deal with these forces.

Implementation Path Development

In addition to the goals, an effective planning process results in several other outputs. These include: objectives, the reason to be working toward each goal; targets, the methods to be used to attain the goals; responsibilities; the person or persons who will be held accountable for the attainment of each target (this does not mean that the responsible person or persons must actually be the one who attains the target, only that they will be accountable for that attainment); measures of success, the “how we will know when the target has been met”; vehicles, the tangible physical evidence of target attainment; and, timelines, the date at which the target will be met. Once all these items have been determined, they are placed on an implementation tree, a tool that visually shows all of the goals, objectives, targets, responsibilities, measures, vehicles, and timelines.

The appropriate implementation program begins with complete dissemination of the planning outcomes and the process itself. This is catchball. Everyone in the organization needs to be able to see the outcomes to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the direction of the college for the future. The planning documents can be equated to a map toward the future of the college. Without this map, it would be impossible for the college to work collectively to get to where it wants and needs to go in the future. The next phase of the planning process is the implementation phase.

Implementation Phase

A planning document that is not used is a waste of resources. It is a waste of the time spent to develop it, it is a waste of the resources used to put it together, and it is a waste of the effort of those who worked on it. Therefore, it must be something that can be implemented effectively. To do this, we need to understand the functional structure of an organization. In most cases, an organization is hierarchical. This means that there is someone at each level of the organization who is accountable for his or her actions and those of the people who report to him or her. This has nothing to do with management styles; it is just a statement of reality. The implementation of the plan works with this relationship.

This process is one of replication; the goals of the organization are met by organizational targets; these targets are attained through the achievement of departmental or divisional means; the departmental or divisional means are achieved through individual means. This process then filters down throughout the organization. At this point, not only does everyone in the organization have the ability to see the overall direction of the college and how it will get there, everyone can begin to see what his or her supervisor is going to do to help achieve the college-wide goals. This process gives clear direction to everyone regarding what they need to do to help the college move forward.

Part of the process of implementation is the development of contingencies. The process of contingency development is crucial for long-term planning to be successful. If you were on a long journey in your car across the country and you had a flat tire, you would have the tire fixed and resume the journey. You would not then change the destination. This should be the same for an organizational journey. When calamity hits, we need to be able to deal effectively with the situation and then resume our journey toward the vision. This requires that we ensure that we will be able to deal effectively with those potential calamities. The tool that is used to develop the contingencies is the process decision program chart or contingency chart. This chart graphically shows how to deal with potential problems before they become realities.

To be most effective, the implementation matrix system should be used as the performance review vehicle. Instead of employees being review and evaluated in the typical way, on job description, this system enables the organization to do review based on what the employee is doing to help contribute to the overall success of the organization as a whole. It is a way to help focus the entire organization on more global, college-wide issues instead of local, departmental issues and directions that may not be in alignment with the overall direction needed to help the college succeed.

Audit Phase

Phase three is the audit phase. A plan is no better than the organization's ability to ensure that it has been followed. The audit phase goes back to the data accumulated in the beginning of the planning process, the needs of the students and other customers of the college. This was the reason to develop a plan, to better meet the needs of the customers. It is those needs that we use to audit the plan. The actual method in which the audit is done uses quality improvement tools for clarity and visibility. Again, at first use, some of these tools may seem complex and awkward, but as the users become more familiar with the process, the level of complexity and awkwardness diminishes rapidly.

The audit process needs to look to several things: what were the needs of the customers, how were they met, were they met in the prescribed timeline, and were they met to the satisfaction of the students and other customers. All of this information can be determined on a "effectiveness matrix." This matrix is in reality several matrices in one.

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Conclusion

This planning model was developed to assist a college become more effective in its ability to address the needs of its students as measured by the needs of the customers themselves. This is not inappropriate, for it is the customers of an organization that make the ultimate determination of the quality of that organization's products or services. In the case of education, the customers include students, business and industry, accreditation agencies, taxpayers, and employees. If the college cannot meet the needs of the students and other customers, they will go elsewhere. This lack of revenue, lack of partnership opportunities, lack of accreditation, lack of financial support, and lack of quality educational opportunities. When this happens, the result can be that the college ceases to operate. The issue is that clear.

The rationale for the development of this implementation model is that each college is unique. Each college has differing environmental, fiscal, governance, geographic, and demographic issues affecting their ability to effectively meet the needs of their students. It is therefore critical to develop a model that has the flexibility to adapt to the differing situations of each college.

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