

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Office of Quality Improvement

A Collection of Planning Corner Articles

OFFICE OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

A Collection of Planning Corner Articles

Kathleen A. Paris

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The “Planning Corner” is a regular feature in *ExCHANGE*, the newsletter of the Office of Quality Improvement (OQI). The Planning Corner articles in this collection are presented in the order in which they appeared from May/June, 1995 – January/February, 2000.

A document entitled *Strategic Planning in the University* provides a detailed overview of the strategic planning process used by the Office of Quality Improvement. This document is available upon request.

The Office of Quality Improvement provides facilitation, consultation, and assistance for strategic planning for academic departments and administrative units. For additional information contact:

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About the Author

Kathleen A. Paris, Ph.D. (1981, Educational Administration, UW-Madison), has served as a planning consultant for the Office of Quality Improvement since 1994. She has provided strategic planning advice and facilitation to over 60 academic departments, administrative units and cross-campus efforts.

Paris is a frequent presenter at the Academic Leadership Series workshops and has spoken on strategic planning in higher education at national conferences such as The American Association of Higher Education (1996 and 1997), North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (1997), and the Society for College and University Planning (scheduled for July, 2000). Paris has authored a number of publications on planning and improvement in higher education which are available from the Office of Quality Improvement.

What Is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a means of establishing major directions for the department or administrative unit. Through strategic planning, resources are concentrated in a limited number of major directions in order to maximize benefits to stakeholders – those we exist to serve and who are affected by the choices we make. In higher education, those stakeholders include students, employers of graduates, funding agencies, and society, as well as internal stakeholders such as faculty and staff. Strategic planning is a structured approach to anticipating the future and “exploiting the inevitable.” The strategic plan should chart the broad course for the next five years. It is a process for ensuring that the budget dollars follow the plan rather than vice versa.

It is sometimes thought that strategic planning is just another buzz word for long-range planning. There are major differences between strategic planning and garden-variety long-range planning. First, **strategic planning is much more sensitive to the external environment than long-range planning**. Traditionally, long-range planning was inwardly focused. The goals and objectives were formulated with minimal attention to the larger system in which the institution functioned.

Related to the first difference is the fact that traditional long-range planning tends to maintain the status quo over time. Assuming that the future will be a linear extension of the present, planners typically spend little time attempting to reshape the organization. Strategic planning is much more **likely to result in a deliberate shift in direction or refocusing of mission** in light of changes, actual or anticipated.

Since long-range planning has generally been oriented to the status quo, visioning was not a critical component. Strategic plans, however, are developed around a vision of success or a **vision of the desired future**. This idealized word picture represents the best possible future for the institution. The plan helps make this shared vision a reality.

Bryson (1988) points out another distinction. Long-range planning focuses more on specifying goals and objectives, while strategic planning is more focused on identifying and resolving issues. In fact, goals and objectives which are considered operational planning should not be developed before a [department] has completed its strategic planning (pp. 5-6).

The strategic planning model used by the Office of Quality Improvement, UW-Madison, is shown in Figure 1. This model is very flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of the department or administrative unit.

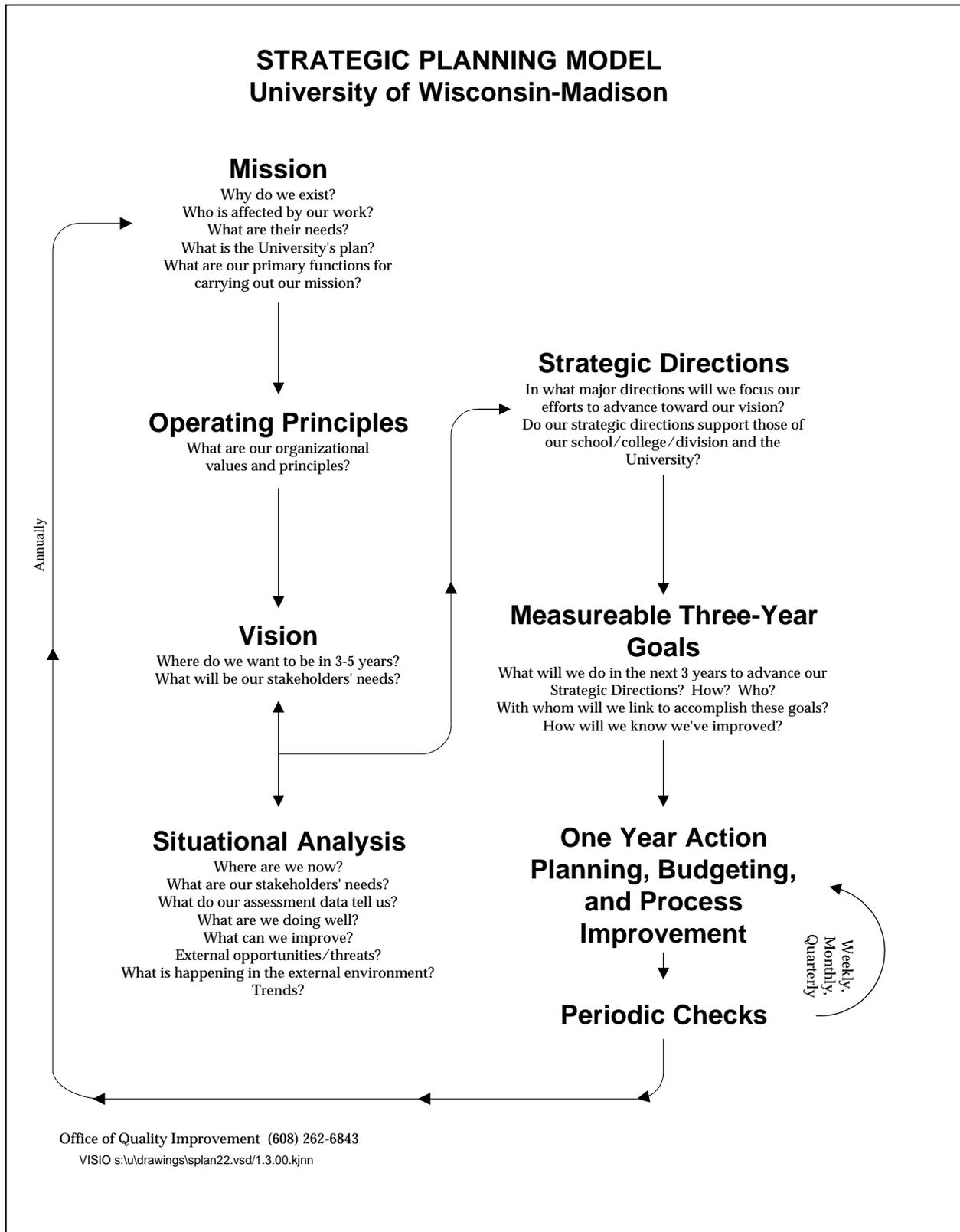


Figure 1. Strategic planning model used by the Office of Quality Improvement

Involving People in Planning

In strategic planning, the process is as important as the product. A collaborative planning process helps ensure that people understand the plan and are willing to implement it. One criterion for judging a sound strategic plan is this question, "Is there evidence that everyone in the organizational unit or department participated in some meaningful way in strategic and annual planning?"

In the model developed by the office of Quality Improvement, a planning group of 10-20 members representing the entire organizational unit or department is convened. This planning group develops the proposed plan in a one- or two-day retreat through a facilitated process.

How can everyone be involved directly or indirectly? The following four approaches are being used successfully on the UW-Madison campus and elsewhere.

1. Survey the entire unit prior to the strategic planning event regarding unit strengths and weaknesses;
2. Hold focus groups to identify internal and external trends affecting the unit;
3. Present the proposed plan to the entire unit for feedback and revision (This step can also be done via mail or E-mail);
4. Involve a variety of people in work teams to refine and carry out the broad three-year goals identified in the strategic planning process. Thus, many people can serve on work teams who were not necessarily involved in the planning event.

Equally critical to good planning is the need to involve external stakeholders in the process. The next "Planning Corner" will focus on practical ways to involve those groups whom our organization exists to serve.

May/June, 1995

Determining Stakeholder Needs

This is the second in a series of articles on effective strategic planning. Each article highlights a question regarding the planning process or the plan itself. The more heartily the questions posed can be answered in the affirmative, the more effective the planning exercise is likely to be.

Is there evidence that data on the needs of all the stakeholders but especially those from outside the organization were sought and used in the planning process?

One of the elements of strategic planning that distinguishes it from garden-variety long-range planning is attention to the larger social, economic and political systems in which the organization operates and specifically to the needs of stakeholders. In a University, the external stakeholders (those outside of the immediate unit, department, school, college, division) may be many. In the planning model used by the Office of Quality Improvement, the first step is defining mission or purpose. The next question becomes, "For whom do we do these things?" For departments involved in strategic planning, this can include students, funding agencies, other departments, employers who hire graduates, and a host of others including society at large. For administrative units, external stakeholders can include faculty, academic staff, classified staff, students, other agencies or organizations, and the like. Following are some practical ways to involve those who we exist to serve in the planning process with the goal of determining their needs.

1. Include several key stakeholders in the strategic planning group. These external representatives will bring fresh insights and valuable feedback to the planning process. Most departments, units, and colleges on this campus who have invited stakeholders to participate in one or even two-day planning retreats have received positive responses to the invitations.
2. Hold focus groups of key stakeholders prior to the major planning event to determine their needs and satisfaction levels. The information generated from the focus groups is valuable for the situational analysis, a major step in the planning event. This information also helps determine where gaps exist between the current situation and the organization's vision for itself in the future.
3. Circulate the proposed strategic plan to external stakeholders for review and comment. Ask them, "What do you like about the proposed plan? What causes you concern? Did we miss anything?" The proposed plan should be changed as necessary to reflect stakeholder needs.

The next "Planning Corner" focuses on the role of cooperation, collaboration and integration of resources in strategic planning.

July/August, 1995

Cooperation, Collaboration and Resource Integration

This is the third in a series of articles on effective strategic planning. Each article highlights a question regarding the planning process or the plan itself. The more heartily the questions posed can be answered in the affirmative, the more effective the planning exercise is likely to be.

”Do annual plans show evidence of cooperation, collaboration and/or integration of resources?”

There is probably not a single department or office on campus that intends to do everything it has done in the past in the same way. One of the strategies for doing the same or more with less is to identify what activities or purchases can be pursued collaboratively, either internally – within the department or office, or externally – with other departments and offices and possibly even outside the University. As an example, four academic departments on campus within one division recently made a decision to work together on a division-wide marketing and promotional effort and to create a plan to centralize administrative services.

The SOAR program (Student Orientation, Advising and Registration) provides an example of how many parts of the campus collaborative to welcome, orient and register new students to UW-Madison. Although SOAR is the responsibility of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, a number of faculty members, staff, and administrators participate, including advisors from all the colleges, the Dean of Students, representatives of Housing, Financial Aids, Police and Security, and many others.

The strategic planning process provides an ideal opportunity to become aware of the opportunities to coordinate, collaborate and integrate and to make plans to do so. The more diverse the planning committee members are in terms of roles and organizational affiliations, the greater the likelihood that opportunities for collaboration and coordination will surface in the planning process.

Our next “Planning Corner” – Prioritizing Goals.

September/October, 1995

Prioritizing

This is the fourth in a series on effective strategic planning. Each article highlights a question regarding the planning process or the plan itself. The more heartily the questions posed can be answered in the affirmative, the more effective the planning exercise is likely to be.

“Does the plan indicate priorities so that people know where to focus their efforts?”

Prioritizing is one of the most difficult aspects of strategic and annual planning. It is difficult to determine what is most important when everything in the plan seems important. There are several ways to identify priorities. Some organizations prioritize their strategic directions every year. (Strategic directions are broad directions in which the department, office or organization focuses its efforts over the next 3-5 years.) Example: In the first year of planning, a department may focus on increasing success at grant-seeking through collaboration with other departments, while the priority in the second year could be improving the student advisement process.

This former approach works well in situations where one direction lays the foundation for several others. For example, securing an easily accessible location may be necessary in order to provide certain services. One of the difficulties of prioritizing at the level of broad directions is that the directions themselves can be very much intertwined. For example, a strategic direction dealing with improving communications with external stakeholders could be closely linked with the strategic direction to improve electronic technology.

An alternative to annually prioritizing the broad directions is to prioritize the annual goals under each direction. This approach assumes that the organization will make some progress on all its strategic directions each year. In general, most departments and offices that are engaging in strategic planning find this later approach to prioritizing more feasible than the former.

Several tools of continuous improvement can be used to help prioritize the goals. An **interrelations diagram (ID)** can show which of the goals drive the others, thus creating a natural priority. A **consensus matrix** in which the planning group identifies weighted criteria and then evaluates each goal in terms of the criteria will result in a numerical ranking of goals. Some offices and sub-units of departments are able to **write each goal on a self-stick note** and place each note on a flip chart ruled into 3 categories – critically important to do this year, important to do this year, and not important to do this year. Activities that are required by outside agencies or others are automatically placed in the “critically important to do this year” strata.

Regardless of the method used to identify annual priorities within the plan, it is an important step in moving the plan from paper into action. The five-year view can be overwhelming to any group. The prioritizing processes described above help break the plan into more manageable pieces and provide a shared understanding of the most effective sequence of activities.

Next, we will examine a related question, “Does the plan show that choices have been made?”

November/December, 1995

Strategies Within Strategic Planning

This is the fifth and final in a series of articles on effective strategic planning. The more heartily the question posed can be answered in the affirmative, the more effective the planning exercise is likely to be.

“Does the plan show that choices have been made?”

One of the characteristics that distinguishes effective strategic planning is the imperative to focus. The late Professor Dale McConkey, Management Institute, University of Wisconsin, characterized strategy as “exploiting or capitalizing on limited resources by concentrating your limited resources in those limited number of major directions or options where you can realize the greater benefit levels for clients or users ...”

Examples of strategic directions that a department, office, school, or institution might pursue include growth, contraction, revenue, expenditure adjustment, and hesitation strategies*. Each strategy is discussed below with a University of Wisconsin-Madison example. Organizations may apply these strategies differentially, for example, growing in some areas and contracting in others.

Growth – to other geographic areas or through new services, programs, or products. The School of Business has recently expanded its academic services. Established in 1995, the Executive MBA program enables working executives to complete the program in two years by attending weekend classes. The Puelicher Center for Banking Education is the newly opened conference center where a variety of banking courses, programs and conferences are provided. Another recent addition, the Business Information Center, enables people to try out various computer hardware and software before purchasing their own systems. The Center also assists with electronic data searches.

Contraction – as in market rationalization or unit shut-down. The Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, in its strategic plan, has proposed rationalizing certain laboratory services between the department, the Medical Center, and the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene. Thus, rather than providing competing services, each unit could focus on fewer services, while ensuring the full range of services to patients.

Reducing Expenditures – through cost cutting, increased efficiency due to technology or subcontracting. The Graduate School has begun the process of creating an electronic admissions and student records system. Over time, this will enable the admission staff which is not expected to increase, to respond to increasingly diverse student needs.

Increasing Revenue – through price increases or new sources of revenue. Increasing tuition and student fees is but one strategy to increase revenue, and not necessarily the most effective. The Department of Zoology has identified increasing revenue through private sector fundraising as a strategic direction for the next three years and has begun work on one-year goals for the fundraising effort.

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Adjusting quality and/or mission – increasing quality or productivity or purposely changing the organizational mission to better meet current needs. Examples abound on campus of improvements in educational and administrative services. The Bradley Learning Community, housed in Bradley Hall, opened in 1995. This living and learning community demonstrates how university housing can add value to the educational experience by simultaneously nurturing students' academic, social and cultural development. The Bradley Learning Community features faculty fellows, informal student learning groups, academic and computer support, and opportunities to interact informally with faculty in activities ranging from student/faculty field trips to dinners and debates.

Hesitation – such as a one-year moratorium on certain activities or the decision to maintain the present position for a time. Hesitation is only a strategy when it is time-limited. Without a purposeful decision to wait and in the absence of any of the aforementioned strategies, a decision to maintain the status quo is often a sign of atrophy.

January/February, 1996

*Taxonomy by Barbara J. Francis, New Directions Consulting, Markesan, WI.

Implication of Systems Thinking for Higher Education

*A system is a collection of parts which interact with each other to function as a whole ...
Dividing a cow in half does not give you two smaller cows."*

In *Systems One: An introduction to Systems Thinking*, Kauffman (1980) explained the two kinds of loops upon which systems thinking is based—positive and negative feedback loops. Negative feedback loops are like the systems in our body that keep our temperature constant. If we are too hot, we perspire to cool off. If we then get too cold, we get goose bumps and start shivering in order to warm up again.

This human thermostat system is referred to as a "negative" feedback loop because the system cancels out or "negates" any changes to the system. (Although negative feedback ordinarily connotes criticism, in this case, negative feedback isn't necessarily good or bad. It merely negates changes in the system.)

Negative feedback loops provide for stability in a system and are thus referred to also as "balancing loops." You would expect to find balancing loops in systems like: cruise control on a car, blood pressure, hitting a baseball, supply and demand, ecological succession and the like.

The second type of systems feedback is "positive" feedback. In a positive feedback loop, any change feeds back into the system, amplifying and creating more expansion. Positive feedback loops are known as "reinforcing" loops. Knowledge growth is an example of a positive or reinforcing loop--the more knowledge that was accumulated and preserved throughout history, the more knowledge could be created and the rate of knowledge creation continues to explode.

Reinforcing loops provide for expansion, growth and change. Rabbit reproduction, healthy cell division, cancer, the spreading of rumors, power acquisition, epidemics, and fires are all examples of positive feedback or reinforcing loop systems. These loops amplify the disturbances or changes in the system until something breaks the cycle. (The vicious circle is a reinforcing loop.)

"Most people think and act in straight lines--simple cause-effect chains. A systems perspective, in contrast, teaches us that reality is made up of circles. These circles of influence [balancing and reinforcing loops] have dramatic impact on how organizations behave, [and] how leaders make decisions..." (Cotter, Seymour, and Sensenbrenner, 1995, p.1).

Although there are endless possible combinations, systems thinkers have identified eight of the strongest and most common patterns or archetypes. These frequently encountered cause-and-effect circles (archetypes) are useful tools for understanding the causal interrelationships that drive organizational behavior. Once understood, the archetypes enable one to more easily recognize them, interrupt dysfunctional cycles, and avoid creating them in the first place.

The First Archetype: Fixes that Backfire

Peter Senge identified the eight archetypes (1990) based on the earlier work of Jay Forrester and others and Daniel Kim (1993) further refined them. "Fixes that Backfire" is Senge's Archetype 1. (Kim calls it "Fixes that Fail".)

This archetype is the easiest to recognize: a problem symptom requires action; a fix is quickly implemented which temporarily alleviates the symptom. The unintended consequences, however, actually worsen the problem. Senge suggests looking at your worst current problem. If there is a pattern of small triumphs followed by long slumps, there may be a Fixes that Fail structure involved (1994, p.127).

One of several strategies Senge suggests for dealing with a Fixes that backfire archetype is to increase organizational awareness of the unintended consequences, open up people's mental models by acknowledging that the fix is merely alleviating a symptom. Then, says Senge, give up the fix and reframe and address the root problem. (These actions require straightforward communication and contributions of ideas from varied points of view.) For descriptions of the eight systems archetypes as well as several more, see Senge (1990, 1994) and Kim (1993).

Improving Higher Education Decision-making and Planning

Dan Seymour, author of *Once Upon a Campus* (1995) addressed the UW-Madison Quality Development Network recently to discuss the implications of systems thinking for decision-making in higher education. The QDN group studied a case from *Once Upon a Campus*, a collection of stories from higher education that examine the effects of decisions in terms of balancing and reinforcing loops. In the case study about a university's problem keeping its housing filled, no one person was charged with responsibility for the vitality of the campus housing system, even though several people were charged with pieces of the responsibility. No individual had a view of "whole" or the authority to make decisions that affected the housing system as a whole. It was not difficult to see that a decision aimed at filling the dorms would have the long-term effect of actually reducing occupancy and causing other unintended and unwelcome consequences.

Dan made these points about applying systems thinking to planning and decision-making in higher education:

1. Processes degrade over time. A process as a "whole," whether that process is teaching or registering students, needs to be monitored and continually improved. Without someone having the view of the whole, any process becomes like a rental car with a lot of people using it, but no one feeling a sense of responsibility for the vehicle over time.
2. Almost any decision carries both long-term and short-term implications; the results of the long- and short-term are often diametrically opposed.

3. Every decision or action is both a cause and effect. (Senge characterizes today's problems as yesterday's solutions.)
4. We tend to react to and manage "events". With a systems thinking orientation, we can make better decisions because we will have thought through the various potential effects, intended and unintended. "It's like putting on a new pair of glasses—you will see things that other people don't see."
5. Within higher education, we typically lack a systematic means to learn from our mistakes. Since initial cause and ultimate effect can be separated by a great deal of time and space, this kind of learning is not likely to occur without a conscious effort.

Dan pointed out that sophisticated computer simulations are available to show how one change in a higher education institution, like changing entrance requirements or raising tuition, affects virtually every other aspect of the organization. He said, however, that educators could make better decisions without these sophisticated simulations by recognizing the ineffective patterns in their organizations and making a conscious effort to change or prevent them.

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March/April, 1996

Eli Goldratt: Challenge Basic Assumptions

*Eli Goldratt is an international leader in the development of new management philosophies and systems and founder of the Avraham Y. Goldratt Institute, New Haven, Connecticut. His presentation style is lively, iconoclastic and challenging. Eli Goldratt came to Madison via an on-line interactive satellite downlink on Thursday, May 9, 1996. He is author of the well-known book *The Goal*, co-written by Jeff Cox (1992, North River Press, Inc.). Since its original publication in 1984, 1.5 million copies have been sold.*

The Goal is a novel, a fact which immediately distinguishes it from other management books. Set in a small town, the story is told Mickey Spillane-style. The hero is Alex Rogo, manager of a manufacturing plant that is three months from closing. His wife, fed up with his constant preoccupation with work problems, leaves him with two young children. Although the context is a manufacturing business, the book is about change.

Throughout *The Goal*, Rogo's mentor, a distinguished physicist-turned-management-consultant uses a Socratic questioning technique to help him challenge basic assumptions. These questions are part of the framework Goldratt will present on May 9. This thinking-questioning process can help leaders understand the true goals of an organization, identify root causes of problems and create improvements that move the organization toward its goals. Goldratt's theory of constraints provides a framework for deciding what to change, what to change to, and how to implement the change.

In the novel, Goldratt says that some of the basic assumptions on which leaders base decisions are patently wrong. Most incentive systems assume that personal productivity (whether in terms of creating electronic parts or juried articles) is based on the individual's own potential. This is false, says Goldratt – Everyone's productivity hinges on constraints in the larger system. His Socratic framework helps find and change these systemic constraints.

We use the wrong measures to determine success, he says. In business, the wrong measures are embedded in cost accounting, says Goldratt. The educational analogue could be faculty classroom hours as a measure of quality. Leaders make decisions with minimal understanding of how one decision affects everything else. Rogo reflects to his wife, "Things that we never thought were related start to be strongly connected to each other (p. 318).

Besides being an engaging story, *The Goal* illustrates the subtle power of questioning. "Whenever we think we have final answers, progress, science and better understanding ceases" (n.p.).

May/June, 1996

World Future Conference 1996: Implications for Higher Education

An edited version of this article appeared in the October 1996 issue of Quality In Higher Education and is printed here with permission of Magna Publications, Inc..

The annual conference of the World Future Society held recently in Washington D.C. provided a kaleidoscope of views on the future of education, business and economics, culture, politics, technology, and the environment. Some of the things I heard: a prediction that microwave ovens are on their way out due to consumer dissatisfaction with the quality of microwaved food; a precipitous rise in food prices world wide is imminent as food and water increasingly become the international political issue; by 2020, half of the people of the earth will speak English; marketing strategists are looking at the needs of the “dividual” which is a subset of every individual based on the idea that people have different consumer needs after work hours than during the business day; one can now purchase mutual funds at convenience stores through Internet kiosks--access to the Internet being a fast-developing feature of convenience stores; voice and picture E-mail is close to its flashpoint, making E-mail an electronic coffee table; the U.S. military services successfully use virtual reality as a teaching tool -- educators could seize the opportunity to learn how this technology could be adapted for higher education; non-profit organizations are changing from a model of providing assistance to providing information; the world is going cashless--pennies will probably be the first to disappear; an estimated 5 million people in the U.S. have begun to simplify life and reduce material consumption; if manufacturers owned forever the products they produced (an idea that is gaining momentum) they would have incentives to make products that last longer, are easy to repair and maintain and can ultimately be disposed of in an ecologically safe way; and the one thing every individual can do to contribute to the well-being of humans and the earth itself is to eat less meat.

Several themes were consistently voiced in various sessions throughout the conference and are summarized here along with questions they raised for higher education.

Teaching and learning pre-K through higher education must be interdisciplinary because the earth’s problems are interrelated.

Donald Lauria, M.D., New Jersey Medical School said, “A tragic example of how poorly we grasp this fact is the AIDS epidemic. For 15 years, the AIDS advocacy people didn’t talk to the family planning people who didn’t talk to the CDC who didn’t talk to microbiologists. For 15 years, everyone referred you to someone else--they finally got together, but not till AIDS has reached epidemic proportions.”

What changes in the system, framework, and processes of higher education are needed to create interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning opportunities for faculty, staff and students?

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Ask “What” instead of “Why”.

Our current ways of thinking and problem-solving limit potential breakthroughs because they drive us to ask questions about what exists now, according to Gerald Nadler, President, Center for Breakthrough Thinking, Inc., Los Angeles. “The ‘why’ questions tend to get people to look at smaller and smaller aspects of problems. We should ask, ‘What is it we are trying to do? What is the larger contextual purpose?...The phrase, ‘Don’t reinvent the wheel’ seems to say that an organization can and should use what has worked for others. Instead, we should ask, ‘Do we really need a wheel?’”

In our efforts to improve higher education processes, whether instructional or administrative, do we invest adequate time at the start in clarifying purpose and creating purpose hierarchies? To what extent do we distinguish between outputs and purposes? (e.g. To reduce the time spent doing X is not a purpose.) Are we involving the appropriate people in appropriate ways in the design stage of problem-solving?

The quality of information in this Information Age is poor.

Many organizations are failing to adapt to the world around them. Author-Consultants Bonnie Kasten and Gilbert Steil, Jr. of St. Michaels, Maryland said that successful organizations have environmental scanning processes in place to monitor what is occurring outside the organization as a matter of course. “In most organizations, people have too much data and not enough information. As a result, people don’t get the information from outside the organization that they need to do their jobs well. The quality of the information most people receive for getting their work done is very poor.”

Who in a higher education institution ensures that environmental scanning occurs? Who ensures that the institution has adequate information coming in from the outside to anticipate change? How can the environmental scanning process become a natural part of work?

The workplace can be a lever for significant social change, through creating a sense of community and enabling people to do meaningful work that uses their talents.

Recognizing that every employee is a whole person with a life outside of work cannot be ignored without serious consequences--ineffective or dysfunctional workplaces. Margaret Lulic, authored *Who We Could be At Work* (1996), a collection of stories based on interviews of 50 people nation-wide working in companies or organizations where a conscious effort was being made to create workplaces that maximized human talent. “People can take home many of the skills they learn at work about teamwork, quality, problem-solving, integrity, and thinking in terms of the whole. It can affect their homes lives, their marriages, how they deal with their children and families. Sixty-five percent of the employees at one company cited in the book said that the transformation at work had changed [enhanced] their family and community lives.

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What can higher education institutions do to enable all faculty and staff to contribute their talents and energy in a way that is meaningful for them and that enhances teaching, research, and service? What benefits and disadvantages, for example, would a more flexible work-week provide? Are there management practices and systems in higher education that routinely create frustration and discouragement without adding much value to the work of the institution?

Center education around major issues or problems to develop meliorists.

This theme about the potential contribution of higher education was voiced consistently throughout the conference. Meliorism is the belief that human society naturally tends to move toward improvement and that this improvement can be increased through deliberate human effort. In contrast, Paul Hawken, author of *The Ecology of Commerce* (1993), spoke of the pessimism college students express about their own futures and the future of the earth.

Jerome Karle, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, addressed the conference plenary session and said that science and technology alone cannot reverse the deterioration of the natural environment. Government leadership and social commitment are needed as well. One needs to do this in a framework of human and ethical considerations, said Karle. "Factual materials in the absence of ethical sensitivity and sharpened reasoning may be one of the reasons there are so many problems in so many societies around the world."

Sinnott and Johnson (1996) proposed a "radical" higher education model--a problem-focused, multi-site, international university without departments, schools, or colleges. "What about bringing the best minds in the world together around specific pressing problems and issues -- housing, food, transportation, water, and the like? A university could have 5000 faculty world-wide working on different aspects of the problem using virtual learning and electronic communication. A university student's first year would be devoted to research fundamentals. Once past the first year, a student would join a team to work on a particular project." The authors said that one of the most important things a university can teach is "how the world works."

What do we do as educators to help students comprehend the major issues and problems facing the planet? To what extent does our current pedagogy and our curriculum content prepare students to actively address the problems of the earth and its peoples? What messages do we as educators intentionally or unintentionally send to students about meliorism? What messages could we send and what would it take to do it?

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September/October 1996

Environmental Scanning

The last “Planning Corner” included some of the themes heard consistently throughout the recent annual conference of the World Future Society in Washington, D.C. Some of the themes heard consistently were:

- teaching and learning must be interdisciplinary because the earth’s problems are interrelated;
- education should be centered around authentic current issues or problems to create meliorists;
- our ability to solve problems in any setting is limited by our thinking about what exists now and our lack of attention to the fundamental purpose of the effort;
- by enabling people to do meaningful work that uses their talents, the workplace can be a lever for significant social change; and
- although data abound in this Age of Information, the quality of information available to most people, especially relative to developments occurring outside their organizations, is insufficient for them to perform their jobs well.

“When the environment is turbulent, an organization or community ignores what is happening outside its boundaries at its peril,” added presenters Bonnie Kasten and Gilbert Steil, Jr., consultants from St. Michaels, Maryland. It struck me that anyone who helps facilitate the strategic planning process in an institution of higher education is in a unique position to help colleagues and stakeholders receive information from outside the organization and with that information to help them forecast and construct desired futures.

An educational institution needs an environmental scanning process to ensure that fresh information consistently flows into the organization. A permanent scanning team is one approach. Kasten (in press) suggests that making these external environment connections may be a new role for middle managers. (Also see Ashley and Morrison, 1995.)

No one can accomplish the environmental scanning task single-handedly. Someone, however, has to manage the overall process of scanning and ensure that the information is conveyed to the rest of the organization in useful ways.

Environmental scanning is essential to “futuring” and futuring is essential to creating strategy. “Strategic plans” are often business-as-usual-long-range plans that are not grounded in a view to the future and not strategic at all. Futuring may be viewed as not particularly important when current problems demand all our attention. Futurist Daniel Burris, author of *Technotrends* (1993) says that current problems are not necessarily our biggest problems. “Your biggest problem is failing to solve your future predictable problems before they happen.” He advocates

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spending less time on current problems and more time defining future opportunities to help shift the organization from present-focused crisis management to future-focused opportunity management.

Both environmental scanning and futuring should be part of any strategic planning process. Without a means to look up from the dashboard, it is difficult, if not impossible, for people to imagine new alternatives. A relatively simple means of infusing information about the environment into strategic planning is to invite a panel of stakeholders from outside the department, school, college or university to share with the planning group what is happening in their domains. Another option is that various members of the planning group prepare one-page summaries of trends or events occurring outside the organization. These exercises inform the ensuing analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT).

I have begun many strategic planning events for educational institutions with a presentation by a futurist followed by a dialogue about what it all means for us. Organizations are sponsoring Future Search events which can involve 70-80 (and even more) stakeholders who pool their knowledge and aspirations to create a shared vision of the future. That shared vision becomes the basis for action (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995). Other methodologies involve creating more than one future scenario and developing strategies for the most likely future(s).

A Madison-based strategic planning consultant recently facilitated a planning session within a large urban university. He reports that the dean was initially concerned about how a futuring activity might be accepted by faculty and staff. The consultant provided copies of an article describing the top ten innovative products for the year 2006 identified by Battelle, an Ohio-based research institute. Planning participants worked together at their individual tables, each table focusing on one of the identified future technologies. They discussed what a given prediction might mean to their personal lives, the health care industry (a key stakeholder for them) and their own school. A speaker for each table then shared with the larger group the implications they saw for the organization. The consultant says that participants found this hour-long dialogue both invigorating and very useful to the planning exercise.

Access to technology is expanding the options for visioning and environmental scanning. The Internet makes electronic community meetings possible. Videoconferencing, which is becoming increasingly available will make video panel discussions feasible for local planning efforts. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Ph.D., a former organizational development consultant to the Clinton White House, is now Executive Director of American Speaks, a non-profit organization. Lukensmeyer (in press) is using the World Wide Web extensively to involve citizens from across the country in the organization's mission of democratizing the federal government.

Timothy Biggs, Director, Issues Management, Prudential Communications Group, Newark, New Jersey, discussed environmental scanning at the World Future Society Conference. He said that an external development, such as a particular piece of legislation, might be good for one part of the institution and bad for another. "Someone has to be an honest broker of information from the outside."

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November/December, 1996

A New Resource for Departments: Academic Staff Planning

The academic department is at the heart of our University—a place where knowledge is created, integrated, transferred and applied. The effectiveness of academic departments is critical to the success of the whole institution.

Administering a Department: A Guide for Identifying and Improving Support Processes in an Academic Department (1997) provides a methodology for organizing and providing administrative support services to further a department's academic mission. The monograph is the first in the Top-Line/On-Line national series from Prescott Publishing. Authors Jessica Simmons, Maury Cotter, and Kathleen Paris describe the model originally utilized by the History Department in 1994. The departments of Chemistry, Mathematics, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Zoology and the Institute for Environmental Studies have subsequently used the process.

The authors say that most of the processes identified and strengthened through this process are fundamental to any academic department. All departments have unique features and issues. They are, however, more alike than different when it comes to fundamentals such as processing grant applications, producing course materials, maintaining files, purchasing procedures and the like.

Dan Seymour, editor of the series, says, “ There are several things about UW's methodology that impress me: first is the degree to which it involves all members of the department, second is the focus on continuous learning and improvement. The approach ... does not single out a person or function ... what is being said is, we (all of us) know we can do better. Let's enable those people who work in the various processes to work on the various processes”.

Seymour says that the approach “moves beyond a reactive mentality that suggests we fix things when they become sufficiently intolerable. It is a systematic, comprehensive method to improve the department, not once, but proactively and continuously.” (p. 3)

Professor Colleen Dunlavy, formerly associate chair of the History Department and a leader of the pioneering effort, says “One of the strengths of the process is that it asks people to think about who their work matters to.” The results, she says, is greater understanding on the part of the staff about what faculty members do and vice-versa.

Professor James Donnelly, current chair of the History Department says that having administrative processes standardized and documented with clear responsibilities assigned has been helpful. “It makes an enormous difference for the chair since the chair is ultimately responsible for ensuring that faculty members get the help they need from members of the support staff.”

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The eight-step model is based on the following questions:

1. What is our purpose/mission? Who is affected by our work?
2. What do we do to carry out our purpose/mission? What are our values?
3. What are the primary administrative support functions?
4. Who is responsible for each of those functions?
5. What do clients of these functions want and need?
6. Which of these processes are most important? How do they work now, step-by-step?
7. Which are most important to improve? How do we improve them?
8. Did they improve and how do we know? How can we hold these improvements and continue to improve?

Administering a Department: A Guide for Identifying and Improving Support Processes in an Academic Department is available from the Office of Quality Improvement for \$10.00. If you are interested in exploring the possibilities of using this approach in your department or in ordering the publication, contact P.J. Barnes, Office of Quality Improvement, 608-262-6843 or E-mail barnes@mail.bascom.wisc.edu.

July/August, 1997

Planning Milestones

I get worried when the process of creating a strategic planning document takes more than six months. After that amount of time, the plan itself starts to get stale, people may start wondering if anything is really going to happen, and a great deal of the original momentum is lost. Thanks to a Quality Develop Network (QDN) presentation by Ian Hau (a UW-Madison graduate, now a consultant at SmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals). I was able to identify four milestones in strategic planning. These milestones mark the completion of major pieces and are worth celebrating.

- Milestone 1:** Planning event or retreat and creation of a proposed plan
- Milestone 2:** Internal and external review and comment on plan, refinement and official approval of the strategic plan
- Milestone 3:** Development of action plans (annual goals and objectives) tied to the budgeting process
- Milestone 4:** Accomplishment of first year’s goals and objectives and evaluation of impact

Figure 1 provides you with an opportunity to determine which milestones you have already reached in your strategic planning process.

We are here.			
Milestone 1	Milestone 2	Milestone 3	Milestone 4
Proposed plan created.	Plan reviewed and approved.	Action plans developed.	Action plans implemented & evaluated.

Figure 1. Strategic planning milestones

Milestones 1 and 2 should be completed in less than six months. Milestone 3 should be completed in time to budget for the plan and prior to the start of the fiscal year’s activities.

Typically, at the end of the first year of implementation, the process loops back to Milestone 3. A mini-retreat is held to a.) assess progress in meeting goals and objectives b.) determine if there are major changes externally or internally that require a change in strategy c.) delete or modify existing goals and formulate new ones as needed for the coming year.

To keep this plan moving from one milestone to another, a point person is essential. Ideally, the point person should not be the leader of the department, office, school or college. The point person’s role is to ensure that the process itself moves forward and to ensure that a coherent document is created. The plan isn’t very helpful when it’s in pieces. Interestingly this nitty-gritty detail – putting the plan physically together into a usable document – is the point at which more than one strategic planning process has fallen apart. With a designated point person, this is much less likely to happen.

September/October 1997

Ten Suggestions for Helping a Group Achieve Its Aim

1. Clarity of purpose is essential. When the group gets stuck, go back to the purpose.
2. Create a time line and monitor your progress. Have preliminary as well as final deadlines.
3. Maximize meeting time by having clear meeting aims, set times for each item, and action items with people assigned to carry them out. Don't let a meeting end without a clear idea of the next steps.
4. Figure out what information is available now, what you still need, and how you will get it.
5. Decide who needs to know about what you are doing and how you will communicate.
6. Make it easy to communicate with each other (roster, listserv, web-site, etc.)
7. Use a neutral outside facilitator for significant issues.
8. In discussions, keep a visual record of points made (flipcharts, overheads, etc.) This makes it unnecessary for people to keep hammering away at a point to be sure they are being heard.
9. Separate idea generating from idea evaluating. (Brainstorm ideas first, then evaluate them.)
10. When a decision must be made, identify and agree on the criteria for a good decision. Compare each alternative to the criteria before a choice is made.

November/December , 1997

Measures of Success for Your Plan

It is not uncommon for groups to develop plans and begin implementation without knowing how they will measure their success. No credible scholar would conduct research without attention to evidence and outcomes and yet we often manage ourselves without much thought to measuring the results.

Measures of success as used here refer to the metrics that tell you whether your plans and processes:

- achieved the results you expected
- produced results you did not expect or want
- should be changed
- should continue as is or not
- should be measured in other ways

Shared Sense of Purpose and Vision

The foundation for any measures of success must be a shared and consistent sense of purpose and vision for where the department or office wishes to be in the future. “We know who we are, why we are here and where we are heading.” Although developing a shared sense of mission and vision is not easy, a number of campus departments and offices have done so. For example, the Department of Educational Psychology has identified leadership in graduate education as the focus for planning and resource allocation. The School of Veterinary Medicine is focusing on strengthening problem-solving and higher order thinking skills of students in the first three years of the program. Multi-cultural Academic programs and Services (MAPS) in L&S focuses on success in the freshman year. (Additional examples may be found in the document *Creating Measures of Success for Your Plan* cited at the end of this article.)

Two Ways to Think About Measures

Consider measures of success as a common language. Kaplan and Norton (1996) suggest, “The use of measurement as a language helps transform complex and frequently nebulous concepts into more precise form that can gain consensus ...” (p. 15).

Kaplan and Norton (1996) also feature measurement as hypothesis testing. In our plans, there are implicit assumptions that if we do X, then Y will happen. Thus, establishing measures of success and then comparing them to what you thought would happen is a reality test of your hypotheses.

Identifying measures and paying attention to them creates opportunities for “double-loop learning” (Argyris and Schön, 1996). In single-loop learning, leaders ask whether activities were carried out as planned. “Organizations need the capacity for double-loop learning ... [which] occurs when managers question their underlying assumptions and reflect on whether the theory

under which they were operating remains consistent with current evidence, observations, and experience” (Kaplan and Norton, 1996, p. 17).

Use a Mix of Measures

Deming (1986) cautioned leaders about relying too heavily on quantifiable data. One of Deming’s “seven deadly diseases,” in fact, is “Management by use only of visible figures, with little or no consideration of figures that are unknown or unknowable” (p. 98). Thus, it is useful to identify a mix of measures, including short-term and long-term. Measure both actual outcomes (impacts) and the processes that drive the outcomes. Use both objective measures and softer, more subjective measures. An example of impacts would be actual retention rates of students in the major. Measurement of the processes that drive retention might include advising loads of those charged with advising students or review of departmental promotional materials or tracking of patterns in student feedback in exit or alumni surveys.

Ways to Get It Done

1. Think about the measures while the plan is still on paper. Identifying the measures of success during the planning phase will simplify collecting the data later.
2. Automate as much as possible (e.g., hits on a Web page). Use data base programs instead of word processing programs where appropriate.
3. Make collection of a few essential pieces of information part of people’s job descriptions, built into regular processes.
4. Consider sampling and/or periodic measures (e.g., collecting information for one week during each semester).

January/February, 1998

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UW-Madison Provost Keynotes Measurement Workshop

Over 125 people attended OQI's measures workshop, "How Do We Know How We Are Doing? Measuring Your Unit's Success" on January 15, 1998. Fifteen campus offices provided displays of their measurement and data collection activities. Participants had opportunities to work on measures of success for their own offices or and to hear speakers, including a panel in which five UW-Madison seniors discussed measures of success from the student's perspective. Professor Jim Sweet, who directs the annual student satisfaction survey discussed when and how to use surveys. An on-line follow-up conference on the Internet (which included photos from the workshop) allowed participants to share questions and measures of success.

A highlight of the day was the keynote presentation by Provost John Wiley, "The Pitfalls of Averaging and Time Series Analysis." Provost Wiley illustrated some of the ways in which measures are often used and misused and suggested approaches to collecting meaningful information. Figure 1 summarizes his key points.

He cited the infamous *Chicago Tribune* headline that proclaimed that Dewey had beaten Truman in the presidential election of 1948. The *Tribune* data proved to be wrong because pollers had contacted voters by telephone, excluding the significant population of voters who did not have telephones. This was a case of relying on data without attention to the interpretive context (See Figure 1).

Wiley illustrated how fictitious entities or experiences can be created with data with an example of graduate admissions in a college. When graduate applications and admissions for a college were viewed in the aggregate, it appeared that the college was discriminatory, admitting a much smaller percentage of women than men. When the data were viewed by departments, it could be seen that taken individually, all the departments admitted virtually the same or almost the same percentage of women and men. The aggregation and averaging of department figures whose numbers of grad applicants varied greatly in size created a distorted and false view of admission by gender. Wiley mentioned that similar distortions can occur when data from all UW system campuses are averaged. Thus when data from inequivalent units are aggregated, it is often useful to disaggregate them for meaningful analysis.

He cautioned participants against the common error of equating a high positive correlation with cause-and-effect. He also said that smaller sample sizes naturally yield greater variation, so adequate sample sizes as well as random selection are important in conducting surveys.

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Guidelines for the Design and Presentation of Indicators of Performance/Effectiveness
as presented by John Wiley at "How Do We Know How We Are Doing?" on January 15, 1998

1. Any data gathered and reported should be *useful* for process management or mission delivery and should be presented with *interpretive context*.
2. Each candidate indicator should be subjected to the following four questions:
 - a) How is this indicator *useful or meaningful*?
 - b) Is there an *optimum or desired* value for this indicator?
 - c) What *desirable* actions could be taken to improve this indicator?
 - d) What *undesirable* actions could be taken to improve this indicator?
3. Present all data in ways that *preserve the underlying evidence*.^{*} In particular:
 - a) Do not present averages without displaying or giving some measure(s) of the underlying variation(s)
 - b) When the average deviation from the mean is comparable to the mean value itself, the mean value is not representative for most individuals.
 - c) When the mean, medial and modal values are significantly different, display all three or abandon averaging.
 - d) Do not use averaging to create fictitious entities or experiences. (If the calculated average is something experienced by few or no individuals or units, then averaging is inappropriate. If some individual or units "stand out" by deviating greatly from the average, then averaging is probably inappropriate.)
4. When averages are used to summarize more complex data, the summary should not mislead the user into taking actions that would not have been taken had the data been presented as a *time series*.^{*}
5. Never present time series data without displaying the *upper and lower natural process limits* so that significant (and insignificant) variations are apparent.

^{*}Note: Items 3 and 4 are versions of "Shewhart's Rules"

Figure 1. Guidelines for the design and presentation of indicators of performance/effectiveness

March/April 1998

Tips and Tidbits for Chairs Conducting Strategic Planning

Department Chair Edna Szymanski shares the story of how RPSE created a strategic plan and vision for the future that guides resource allocation and other decisions in the department.

The School of Education Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education (RPSE) did strategic planning from September to December 1997. Motivation was high because it was generally known that the School of Education requires strategic plans before approving searches. Nonetheless, organization and respect were our most important tools. Following are some notes on what we did and how it worked. In addition, as a result of the experience, we have some advice for chairs who choose to facilitate the process themselves.

Strategic Planning Team

Each curricular area was asked to choose two tenured faculty members who would most likely be here after the next five years. The team was then comprised of two members from each of the two areas, the department secretary, and the chair.

Meeting Schedule

The team met every two weeks unless there was no agenda. The meeting times were jointly set in stone at the beginning of the process, and meetings lasted no longer than 90 minutes.

The Roles of the Chair and Department Secretary

The chair had developed goals for her activities for the year. One goal was to facilitate effective shared governance through gathering and presenting information that promotes informed planning and decision making. Another goal was to prepare the department for excellence in the coming century through a proactive e strategic planning process. Strategic planning was thus a central activity for the chair, and chairing the process was a way to facilitate achievement of specific goals.

Another goal of the chair was to promote a culture of caring and mutual respect. To that end, it was critical to value the time of the members of the strategic planning committee. Although the department secretary and chair were part of the group, they also served as its staff.

- There was a written agenda for each meeting.
- Meetings were held for no more than 90 minutes.
- We agreed on a draft outline of the product at the first meeting. The outline, which was adapted from the Office of Quality Improvement (OQI) strategic planning chart, guided the rest of the process.

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- Materials were prepared in advance and given to the committee members.
- Area chairs were copied on all materials.
- The minutes of each meeting were done immediately and reflected the agreements made in the meeting, who would do what by when, as well as the agenda for the next meeting.
- The minutes were distributed by E-mail to the whole department and folks were invited to provide input or to attend any meetings.
- The department secretary, the chair, and the graduate secretary did much of the work to assemble material for the situational analysis. The strategic planning committee served as an expert panel to review the format and content of the material assembled. They provided input and feedback from the planning through the product stage.
- Area representatives worked with their areas to develop the trends and stakeholders sections of the plan.
- The strategic planning committee started with a visioning process provided by OQI and then modified it to meet the needs of the department. In this way, the team felt ownership of the process.
- Visioning was done separately with each area. A department vision emerged as the area visions became clear.

Relationship to Resource Allocation

First, a base programmatic budget was developed. This budget connected the resources received from the college with the specific instructional activities of the department. The budget was developed with the input from the area chairs, examination of historic trends, and help from the college budget officer. It was approved by the department executive committee.

Second, the organization of the budget reflected area control of portions of the budget and departmental priorities. The general principle was that areas could retain funds if they decided to shift their priorities to meet strategic directions. Of course, this remains a particularly prickly issue.

In summary, the department developed an open budgeting process in which the executive committee assumed its rightful responsibility for overseeing the departmental budget (See FPP 5.21). Please note that this may not be an easy task for some departments, because it is intertwined with college budgeting processes. In this case, both the dean and budget officer provided assistance.

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Lessons Learned

Strategic planning must be seen as a process rather than a product. It is a commitment to ongoing data-based decision making and continuous quality improvement. The plan is simply a work in process that reflects that commitment.

To that end, RPSE has adopted an annual department report card. Each year, the department plans to collect and assemble data on faculty productivity, grant production, applications, admissions, course enrollments, graduations, workload, teaching evaluations, and graduate surveys. The chair plans to present this data annually to the department so that it can be used at the area and department level for continuous quality improvement.

In essence, strategic planning is an important tool for effective faculty governance. It involved the faculty in gathering information and making data-based decisions about curricular, personnel, and fiscal matters.

Of course, some situations are not fully resolvable. One curricular area has some irreconcilable differences. The process put those differences on the table. For that area, the plan remains very much of a work in progress. However, putting the differences on the table has allowed examination of structural possibilities for moving forward while acknowledging the differences.

Tips for Chairs Who Facilitate Strategic Planning in Their Departments

Facilitating strategic planning is not for every chair. We believe that chairs who opt for this method must be operating purely from the principle of effective faculty governance and not from personal power. In addition, the following qualities are desirable: (a) good organizational skills, (b) a great department secretary, (c) willingness to do the grunt work, and, most importantly (d) desire to use the strategic planning process to promote effective faculty governance.

The OQI can provide peer debriefing in the form of occasional meetings to discuss the process. In this case, the author met twice over lunch with OQI consultant, Kathleen Paris. It was helpful to be able to talk with someone about the process and its challenges.

Conclusion

For RPSE, the strategic planning process stimulated a reaffirmation of faculty governance and an emphasis on data-based decision making. Local control of the process was a critical element for using strategic planning as the first step to continuous quality improvement.

May/June 1998

Using Technology to Increase Meeting Productivity

Technology can be immensely helpful for streamlining and improving the productivity of meetings. This article is intended to help you think about how four technological tools might be useful to your organization and to suggest some strategies for success. The four tools include discussion databases, electronic meeting systems, video conferencing and E-mail.

Discussion Databases

A discussion database is useful when participants are available at different times. Also referred to as groupware or threaded discussion or forums, they are asynchronous, enabling participants to work at different times. (They are ideal when different time zones or work schedules make even phone conferences difficult.) Examples include Lotus Notes, Netmeeting Collabra, Hypernews, WebCaucus, Facilitate.com., The Soft Bicycle Company's Consensus@nyware®, PushPin™, and Ceilidh™.

A discussion database is more "orderly" than an unstructured list serve because participants nest their replies, comments, questions, and hyperlinks under the message to which they are responding. This provides a visual map of the discussion. For anyone who has been overwhelmed by the volume and perhaps chaotic structure of a free-for-all E-mail discussion, these applications are worth a second look. The visual "map" of responses means that discussions can be focused and refocused, analyzed and summarized with relative ease.

The chief advantages are that all these products are or soon will be configured for use on the World Wide Web and Internet. This means that regardless of the operating system, people can work collaboratively on-line in ways never before possible.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing is an alternative for collaborative efforts that occur at the same time with participants in different locations. The technology can range from a fully-equipped studio to a tiny videocamera mounted on a desktop computer. (Soon the camera will come with the computer.) UW-Extension's Instructional Communication Systems provides videoconferencing services. Commercial businesses such as Kinkos, AT&T, Sprint, Omni and others also provide videoconferencing services, making it possible to try it without necessarily having the on-site technology.

Electronic Meeting Systems

Electronic meeting systems (EMS) usually support meetings in which participants are together at the same time and place. Research studies on EMS show that meeting time can be reduced by 71% and a study by Boeing showed a 170% return on investment for groups using EMS (Marsh, 1996.) One type of EMS is a network of personal computers set up in a room and guided by a facilitator using a "chauffeur" computer. Participants have their own computers (often laptops) and enter their ideas, questions, comments via their individual keyboards. All the ideas are shown on the front projection screen. The items can be discussed and quickly sorted with the

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results displayed graphically within in a few seconds. The fact that everyone contributes at once can create great time savings. Depending on the task at hand, EMS voting and prioritizing can be used to narrow choices, select alternatives or focus the conversation to reach consensus. Participants can leave with meeting results in hand. (Some examples include Meeting Works™ for Windows free for up to 8 participants from www.entsol.com.)

Challenges

Each of these technologies has its own advantages and limitations. Following are some challenges they all share. Some people may be reluctant to use the technology. Communication is not as complete in the absence of non-verbal cues and paralanguage that accompanies face-to-face encounters. Technology can easily shift the balance of power within a group, moderating the impact of high verbal, high status members. Participants from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds may respond differently to the technology, especially at the beginning. Organizational culture may not support sharing of information and effort. Speed, availability and dependability of the hardware and software may also be issues. Participants with disabilities may need special accommodation in materials design.

To Increase Productivity

Markowitz (1998) says, “In general, groups who have worked together before get the best results using computer mediated communications.” She suggests that if participants have not met before, send photos and personal/work biographies on each person. This gives participants information they might have learned through other means in a face-to-face meeting. (Soft Bicycle’s Consensus@nyware® has the bonus of including small photos of meeting participants next to their comments.)

The fundamental requirement for any successful meeting holds true for technology-assisted meetings: a clear purpose for the meeting is essential. To ensure that the purpose(s) can be achieved, every meeting assisted with technology requires advance planning (e.g. What are the intended outcomes? How many issues can we reasonably handle? What do we need to do ahead of time?). Consider involving some of the meeting participants in planning the agenda and identifying key questions.

Facilitation greatly enhances technology-assisted meetings and is essential for videoconferencing and EMS. Facilitators help keep the activity on track, ensure that the full spectrum of ideas is explored, and ensure full participation and access to the tools (Holt, 1998). The facilitator can also assist the group in developing ground rules for working together. Technology, however, will not compensate for poor planning and facilitation.

Keep the technology as simple as possible, especially at the beginning. The software may have capacity to do more than the group is able to do. Palloff and Pratt (1998) suggest that all on-line meetings should be viewed as learning experiences. Acknowledging them as such creates a sense of community which can enhance a group’s effectiveness.

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Don't Forget E-mail

E-mail shines before and after a meeting. The agenda and supporting materials can and should be sent electronically if at all possible. Although it may not be habitual yet, routinely request the E-mail addresses of meeting participants and be sure that committee or team rosters include them. Meeting minutes can be circulated electronically also. Popular word processing software packages include meeting agenda and corresponding reporting templates that make it easy to take minutes on a laptop right at the meeting. Leaving a meeting with results in hand is a powerful gesture. If minutes or information is distributed via a listserve in which everyone receives all responses, be sure people are aware of this. If you have every inadvertently sent a message intended for one individual to the entire listserve group, you can probably appreciate this point.

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Adapted from "Technology-Assisted Meetings" which appeared in the May 28 issue of *DESIEN*, the electronic newsletter of Instructional Communications Systems, UW-Extension.

July/August 1998

Creating Individual Professional Development Plans

Professional development has become almost synonymous with attending conferences. Consider, however, the many additional ways to learn something new. You might observe someone else, read a book, search the Internet, subscribe to a journal, conduct a literature review, take a class, get on a list serve, join a discussion group, visit another organization, or seek out a mentor.

Figure 1 is a simple format that can be used to create individual annual professional development plans. Through this planning tool, one's professional learning goals (first column) are linked to the goals of the department or office (second column). This can ensure that the unit develops or maintains the capacity to fulfill its purposes.

It is helpful for people to share plans. Looking across the plans can reveal patterns of need. For example, if people indicate similar needs, a customized on-site workshop might be an economical and effective option. Maury Cotter, OQI Director, has told the story of creating her own professional development plan several years ago. Upon listing the things she wanted to learn more about, she realized that for every learning need, there was someone within the office from whom she could learn what she needed to know.

Annual Professional Development Plan for : _____

Professional Learning Goal	Related Department/Office Goal(s)	Proposed Activity (what, when, where?)	Cost (including travel)
Learn how to use Excel spreadsheets for grant budgets.	Improve grant financial management	Take DoIT course in October	\$185
Learn more about employee evaluation and feedback.	Improve performance appraisal process for academic staff	Read <i>The Leader's Handbook</i> (Peter Scholtes, 1998). Share key points at January meeting.	\$49
Learn how to handle conflict more effectively.	Improve ability to work as a team.	Contact Employee Assistance Office to get resources.	
Learn what kinds of studies are underway for determining XYZ.	Expand research agenda to include XYZ.	Attend AERA in Montreal in April, 1999	\$1800

Chair/Supervisor Comments:

Chair/Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Figure 1. Format for individual professional development plan

September/October, 1998

Don't Let People Become Isolated

Planning, if it is really planning, requires change. (I contrast real planning with meaningless ritual exercises.) I have come to believe that the single most important thing a leader can do during a change process is ensure that individuals do not become isolated. When people feel isolated, they often become judgmental. Without a legitimate means of comparing their experience and any problems they may be having with anyone else's experience, people can quickly feel fearful and inadequate. In order to create change, individuals, whether staff or faculty, need reality checks and they need them frequently and without penalty. Following are some ways to ensure that people stay connected during the change process:

1. Be sure that everyone, irrespective of job title, who is involved in affecting the change knows why it is occurring, what the dimensions of the change are, and what their role in it is.
2. Have regular progress reports either via E-mail, in person, web page, mini-newsletter, or on a bulletin board.
3. Schedule regular debriefings to discuss successes, problems, and next steps. Don't wait till something goes wrong to bring people together.
4. Allow people to engage in dialogue—a format that allows individuals in a group setting to present their thoughts and feelings without need for debate or rejoinder. Separate dialogue processes from decision-making processes.
5. Set up small peer learning or support groups or a buddy system so that no one is working without a safe person or group with which to share ideas or problems. Be sure that these support groups have a way to feed information back to the larger group so problems can be addressed systemically.
6. Set milestones so that all involved can be acknowledged for their successes. Breaking a large process into smaller milestones can make the whole thing less overwhelming.

Some people do prefer to work in isolation. I submit that those individuals still have some responsibility to provide feedback and share their experience with others committed to the same change process. It is easy to underestimate how much our work affects others.

November/December, 1998

Good Questions: Creating the Future

Thomas Yuill, Director of the Institute for Environmental Studies recently described how their board of visitors helps monitor the IES strategic plan. “They challenge us and we tell them forthrightly what our problems are.” This fall the board of visitors challenged the institute to think boldly and long-term about the leadership IES intends to provide in dealing with environmental problems and issues. “We know that tinkering around the edges with modest reallocation of our limited resources won’t do it,” Yuill says.

To generate bold approaches and ways to do things differently, Yuill posed questions via E-mail to the governance faculty prior to their planning retreat:

The year is 2020:

- a) What are the three most important environmental problems/issues that society will almost certainly be facing (in rank order)?
- b) What should we be doing to deal with these problems/issues (2-3 ideas or activities)?

The year is 2003:

- c) What would you like for IES to have accomplished over the past five years to make progress toward the 2020 goals?
- d) What resources (people, funds, facilities, equipment) will it take to make that progress?

The year is 1998:

- e) What problems is IES addressing currently (or should be addressing) that can be solved by 2020, and not need attention (or not much) after that?
- f) How can/should IES contribute to achieving those solutions?
- g) What organizational changes are needed and what resources will it take to make those contributions?
- h) What should we do to get those resources for the present? By 2003? By 2020?

These are questions that any department or center can ask prior to making decisions about hiring or research foci. Yuill indicated that the board of visitors along with challenging the group to think boldly about the future has offered to assist in fund-raising efforts to acquire the resources needed to accomplish the resulting initiatives.

January/February, 1999

Academic Strategy

One of the most difficult strategic planning concepts to grasp is the very notion of strategy. We all know goals and objectives, but strategy is something different (and larger) than goals and objectives. Strictly speaking, the best strategies focus a department's strengths to seize opportunities to get over, around or through the barriers it faces to being what it wants to be (its vision).

How do you know if you have a strategy or not? If at the end of your planning process, you can identify what you will *do differently* than you have in the past you probably have a strategy(ies). If you leave your planning session with the intentions of trying harder, you probably have not identified any strategies.

Another identifier of a strategy is whether it affects the whole organization to a greater or lesser extent. Goals and objectives tend to affect particular functional areas. Strategies tend to affect everyone. Following are sample academic strategies.

- Streamline/simplify
- Decrease/discontinue
- Partner with others
- Focus on different audiences
- Use technology to do something that is difficult/impossible to do now
- Refocus job responsibilities
- Have one person do what many did
- Have many people do what one person did
- Improve/redesign a particular process (admission, fiscal, committees)
- Decentralize/centralize
- Others

The School of Social Work has been working since September on a comprehensive strategic plan. A planning subcommittee met in February to review strengths, limitations, opportunities and threats and to review the vision for the future development with input from the entire faculty plus students and community. Streamlining and simplifying the undergraduate curriculum was a key strategy identified to move the School toward its future vision.

March/April, 1999

Zoology Student Assessment: Improved Response Rate and New Opportunity Uncovered

The Department of Zoology is strengthening student learning assessment. Part of that process involves getting feedback from alumni on the curriculum as they experienced it. The department has done an annual survey of alumni for a number of years. A goal for this year was to increase the response rate, a goal which was achieved.

Assessment Project Assistant Dianne Gardner, who is working with Chair Deric Bownds and Curriculum Committee Chair Monica Turner, attributes the greatly-increased responses to the alumni survey to several factors:

- 1) making replies much easier by using a one page tear-away format;
- 2) offering incentives for a quick response;
- 3) using the department's web site to collect responses; and
- 4) adding alumni information to the annual report.

Gardner describes the incentives. "It worked out rather nicely that the annual report cover featured a pioneer zoologist, Harriet Bell Merrill, and the department was able to offer free copies of a book about her. We also offered coffee mugs featuring the Zoology Department's sandollar logo. The first 50 respondents got the incentive of their choice."

She noted that the web site actually didn't get as many responses as postal mail, but it did tend to appeal to young people. "We had many more replies this year from graduates of the past five years in both formats. We hope to add an "Alumni Corner" to the web site. People were enthusiastic about this in their survey responses. We think these connections will benefit future survey efforts as well as fundraising. Adding information about graduate students, for instance, to the alumni report and the web site may garner interest from recent alumni."

She added that many respondents, even those who had clearly experienced career success, suggested that the department could do a better job at providing career information to undergrads. "We wonder if perhaps the web site could be used as one way of increasing the career information available to undergrads given that we now have a core group of alumni who responded to the survey and indicated their willingness to share information about themselves on-line. We are not sure what this would look like, but we think the idea has potential."

For more information on the Department of Zoology's learning assessment efforts, contact Dianne Gardner at 608-263-7875 or dcgardne@students.wisc.edu. Funds to support the department's efforts were provided by the University Assessment Council.

May/June, 1999

Employee Creativity

Robert Hall International, a future forecasting agency, recently reported in *The Futurist* that employers are more actively promoting creativity among workers. According to a recent poll of the 1,000 largest U.S. companies cited by the firm, 89% of 150 executives said their firms are doing more now than they did five years ago to encourage employee creativity and innovation.

UW-Madison School of Business Professor Mark Finster includes an examination of creativity as an organizational resource in his course, "An Introduction to Quality and Planning." He defines creativity as the process of generating ideas. He says that everyone can increase creative ability as it can be learned and developed. "The more one practices creative behavior, the more creative one becomes," he says. He believes that creativity is different than standard intelligence. Highly intelligent people are not necessarily more creative.

Finster says that organizations often stifle creativity with inappropriate critical and analytic thinking.

One way to ensure a larger pool of creative ideas for any issue is to brainstorm a list of ideas **without immediate evaluation or comment**. After everyone is out of ideas, the ideas can be discussed and evaluated. Criticizing ideas while they are being brainstormed is a sure way to limit the possibilities generated. Finster suggests having each person in the group pull out a sheet of paper, crumple it up and throw it at anyone in the group who makes a critical statement during the brainstorming phase.

Reference

Help wanted: Creative thinkers. (August-September, 1999). *The Futurist*, p. 2.

September/October, 1999

More Thoughts on Focus Groups

Focus groups were the subject of an article that appeared one year ago in *Exchange* (Volume 2, Issue 4.) The article entitled, “Focus Groups: Overused, Underused, and Abused,” stressed that focus group methodology is ideal for identifying needs and issues and provides a valuable basis for more quantifiable research such as surveys. The point was made that focus group methodology should not be used to evaluate a program or to make statistical projections for the population as a whole.

Meridian Business Resources & Consulting, Inc. has produced a useful piece describing the utility of the focus group as a research methodology. Entitled, “Once More: If the Results are Not Projectable, Why Do Focus Groups?” This article is recommended reading for anyone considering focus groups. Find it at <http://www.bestprax.com/whydo.htm/>.

The article suggests that like other qualitative research, focus groups help us understand causality—*why* people behave as they do. “Knowing *why* helps us see *how*,”—how to design, re-design, refine our offerings, services, products so they will be accepted.

The authors state that qualitative research methodologies like focus groups help us change how we think. Focus groups help us become externally focused. “As insiders, we know the signals we are trying to send. But inevitably, the signal sent seldom equals the signal received....”

The authors contend that the capacity of qualitative research to diagnose and thereby refine (ideas, offerings, messages, services, products) is neither well-understood nor effectively leveraged by decision-makers.

This is why focus groups often get misused to decide **what** to do rather than as Melanie Payne once said, to learn **how** to do something better. ...most of us are more comfortable thinking about **ends** than **means**.

Yet this capacity to diagnose and refine how we implement something is often decisive. Many of the 80-90% of new products that fail each year are good ideas. (p. 3)

Units on this campus are conducting focus groups to deepen their understanding. Facilities, Planning and Management’s Safety Committee is conducting focus groups with employees across the campus trying to learn (and then develop) the best ways to communicate safety-related information to employees. The Medical School is conducting employee focus groups to better-understand issues of organizational climate. The School of Business’s new Evening Master’s degree program administration is conducting student focus groups in order to develop a survey which will be administered annually to students in the program.

If you are interested in conducting focus groups, contact the Office of Quality Improvement, 608-262-6843, oqi@mail.bascom.wisc.edu.

July/August, 1999

Take Your Mission Statement for a Road Test

A mission statement should convey why an organization exists. In the setting of higher education, departments, administrative units, centers, programs and the institution itself should have mission (or purpose) statements. “A mission statement is the ‘touchstone’ by which all offerings are judged. Mission statements differentiate your work from the work of others.” (Topor and Pollard, 1998)

Some mission statements are crisp and to the point. Others are rambling, abstract, and not very informative. Topor and Pollard (1998) offer this simple test of a useful mission statement. They suggest selecting a totally different organization, either a competitor on another campus or a totally different enterprise altogether. Insert the name of the other organization into your mission statement and read it out loud. Topor and Pollard say the more acceptable or plausible it sounds, the poorer your mission statement. They say it means you have not adequately differentiated your unit or organization. (Phrases like “commitment to excellence” can fit any organization and don’t really describe fundamental purposes.)

“If on the other hand, the revised version sounds totally stupid and incongruous, the better your original,” say the authors.

Vague mission statements that do not really relate to the institution’s vision, goals and objectives do nothing to show potential students and donors what you have to offer that is different, they note.

Those who work in an organization with a clear sense of purpose that transcends everyday tasks are able to accomplish their work much more effectively than those where there is no larger shared sense of purpose.

Figures 1 and 2 contain mission (purpose) statements from this campus that clearly convey purpose.

The mission of the Department of Psychology is to improve the human condition through

- Conducting research that improves health and psychological and societal well-being
- Teaching undergraduates so that they will be better-educated citizens and consumers of information
- Creating the next generation of psychological scientists.

We are in a unique position to accomplish these goals because of our ability to link the social, biological, and physical sciences and the humanities.

Figure 1. Sample mission statement from the Department of Psychology

The mission of Student Academic Affairs is to:

- Assist students in reaching their academic potential, attaining their undergraduate degrees, and realizing their human promise as citizens of a global community.
- Preserve the integrity of a Letters and Science degree by interpreting and implementing faculty policies.
- Provide services, information, and support to students, faculty, staff and other constituencies engaged in educational programs, policies and outreach.
- Assist campus-wide efforts to integrate diverse voices into the University community in order to offer a welcoming, supportive, and responsive campus climate.

Figure 2. Sample mission statement from Student Academic Affairs, College of Letters & Science

Reference

Topor, Robert. and Pollard, Elizabeth. (1998). The Topor-Pollard test for evaluating your mission statement. *Marketing Higher Education* (February, 1998).
<http://www.marketinged.com/library/newsltr/1202mhe.txt>.

November/December, 1999