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Planning Failures: Decision Cultural Clashes

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Focus on Policy and Planning

Ten years ago, higher education boasted about its prosperity and success while at the same time focusing on the problems of the times: changes in the demographics of the college population, the competition, the economy, and our social and political attitudes. The specifics of today's problems may be very different but the challenge remains the same. As George Keller states, "Universities are being pushed and pulled out of their traditional role as teachers of postsecondary youth into a quite different role as educators of people of all ages after puberty" (1983, p. 14).

In light of both the magnitude and rapidity of change predicted for the future, the importance of strategic planning as a method for coping with change has been underscored repeatedly and forcefully in the past two decades (see, e.g., Baker & Markin, 1994; Gilbert, 1991; Hall & Elliott, 1993; Migliore, 1991; Myers, 1996; Shires, 1994; Townsend et al., 1992; Waggaman, 1992; and Weimer & Jonas, 1995). At the same time, the complaints and frustrations associated with planning have not gone unnoticed. How often we hear baffled administrators tell how faculty thwarted their best-laid plans and faculty who complain bitterly about the time and resources used up to **[End Page 1]** do something (planning) that really belongs only in the business sector. As Schmidlein (1990) notes, "Comprehensive planning processes frequently opened up a broad array of latent as well as obvious political issues, overloading an institution's capacity for resolving them" (pp. 11-12). Nor will strategic planning "erase the inevitable conflict between institutional and departmental goals or between institutional and departmental and personal goals" (Cope, 1978, pp. 14-15; see also Peck, 1983; Schmidlein, 1990).

Are these complaints valid? And if so, is there any way to mitigate the negativity? Those two questions are the focus of this research. Presenting a conceptual framework that contrasts the decision-making culture of higher education (and within that, the differences between the administration and the faculty) with the rational focus of strategic planning, supported by the results of a case study of an actual planning process, I argue that the complaints are valid, due at least in part to the failure to implement a strategic planning process congruent with the culture of higher education. The remainder of the paper suggests steps that can be taken to avoid those cultural clashes when higher education institutions implement strategic planning.

Why has strategic planning become so prominent in higher education? One certainly might argue that strategic planning is useless, since accurate predictions are so unlikely. However, the point of strategic planning is not to perfectly predict the future and then plan for it. In fact, the pitfalls of such an attitude are aptly expressed in one of my favorite quotes: "He who lives by the crystal ball will often eat broken glass" (Keller, 1983, p. 106). Instead, the purpose of strategic planning is to give colleges and universities tools with which to manage the process of change, whether expected or unexpected.

Administrators are able to direct the actions of their institution more successfully¹ because flexibility and foresight have been incorporated into the institution's decision-making processes. Administrators recognize that institutions cannot respond effectively to change without formalized procedures for comprehensive planning and decision-making. Also, strategic planners believe environmental problems are not just societal or biological problems, but organizational problems. Strategic planners remind administrators that the institution's short-term goals can defeat its long-term goals. Strategic planning is an integrative process during which university leaders can comprehensively analyze the institution's missions, goals, and programs. The members of the institution can become excited about new possibilities and be encouraged to adopt attitudes of rediscovery and reevaluation, thus enhancing the institution's effectiveness in **[End Page 2]** balancing external and internal demands. (For newer, relevant research on this subject, see Baker & Markin, 1994; Crittenden & Crittenden, 1997; Gilbert, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Hall & Elliott, 1993; Hurst, 1994; Johnson & Jonas, 1995; Migliore, 1991; Ray, 1997; Robson, 1996; Schmidlein & Milton, 1990; Townsend et al., 1992; Waggaman, 1992).

With such plaudits, how can we explain the frustrations and battles associated with the process? My research argues that the reason is the failure to acknowledge the inconsistencies between the values of the academic culture and the underlying conceptual basis of strategic planning--its business/rational-based process. An analysis of these cultural differences follows.

Conceptual Framework

This section reviews rational decision-making theory, then explains how that theory is consistent with decision-making when strategic planning is implemented--assuming an idealized description of strategic planning. I then explore assumptions about how decisions are made within colleges and universities and the incongruity of those assumptions with assumptions inherent within rational decision-making theory.

Rational Decision-Making Theory

Organizations characterized by rational decision-making are "oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibit relatively highly formalized social structures" (Scott, 1987, p. 22). Rational choice models presume that, to achieve the desired goal, behavior is purposive and consistent and that autonomous, conscious, and foresightful action can be taken to achieve some goal or value (Pfeffer, 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Rational choices are those which select the one alternative from among many considered to be the most appropriate means for reaching the desired ends (Chaffee, 1983, p. 2; Simon, 1976, pp. 61-62). Furthermore, the link between the decision and the institution's goals and values is critical (Chaffee, 1983, p. 2), as highlighted by the focus on the concept of "means-ends chains" (Cohen & March, 1986; March, 1988b; Simon, 1976). Means-ends chains imply a hierarchy of goals such that actions taken to achieve a goal at one level are selected so that they enhance achieving the goals immediately above it (Simon, 1976, p. 65). This concept assumes that decision-makers have a set of alternatives for action; the alternatives are defined by the situation and are known unambiguously. It also assumes that decision makers know the consequences of alternative decisions--or at least their probable distribution--and that a decision rule exists that will guide the selection of the best alternative on the basis of its consequences for the preferences (March, 1988a, 1988b, p. 371; Chaffee, 1983). Rational decision-making theory, therefore, assumes that optimal choices are made within a highly **[End Page 3]** specified and clearly defined environment (March & Simon, 1958, cited in Grusky & Miller, 1981, p. 135).

Rational Theory and Strategic Planning

The next logical question is about the evidence that strategic planning is grounded in rational decision-making theory (Crittenden & Crittenden, 1997; Liff, 1997; Robson, 1996). A key similarity is that both strategic planners and rational theorists assume that superordinate organizational goals exist and can be specified. Both also assume that alternative courses of action can be identified and evaluated for their potential in furthering goal achievement and that decisions about which courses of action to follow can be reached using logical and analytic procedures. "Because there is goal congruence . . . or enough formal authority to ensure that the selected objectives are pursued" (Pfeffer, 1980, p. 31),

strategic planners and rational theorists also assume that implementation is feasible and likely to occur (Chaffee, 1983; Pfeffer, 1980; Schmidlein & Milton, 1990).

Another similarity relates to the management of interdependencies. Rather than decoupling the links between the organization and environmental influences (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Tolbert, 1985), strategic planners and rational theorists initiate actions aimed at *tightening* the coupling between levels of the organization and between organizational outcomes and the means used to achieve them. For example, like rational decision-making theorists, strategic planners believe that creating a systematic planning structure which limits choices and alternatives is one method by which individual actions become rational and by which organizational performance is enhanced.

Rational decision-making theorists believe that it is important to understand how the organization comes to know its environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 62; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Strategic planners, similarly, do not believe that the organization must be at the mercy of the environment. Rather, since strategic planning is "a conscious process by which an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment" (Lorange, 1982, p. 114; see also Baker & Markin, 1993; Drohan, 1997; Hurst, 1994; Johnson & Jonas, 1995; Liff, 1997; Lynn, Carver, & Virgo, 1996), planners and administrators can be more confident that the interdependence between the institution and its surrounding environment is consciously planned for and taken advantage of when decisions are made and strategies implemented (Cope, 1987).² **[End Page 4]**

Both strategic planners and rational decision-making theorists are concerned with organizational culture, i.e., the manipulation of meaning and symbols (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 62; Drohan, 1997). Evidence of strategic planners' concern with organizational culture is their emphasis on developing a planning culture (Baker & Markin, 1993; Cope, 1987; Meredith, 1985; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Prinvale, 1988; Schmidlein & Milton, 1990; Shipengrover, 1996).

Another similarity between rational theorists and strategic planners is the concern with effectiveness (Gilbert, 1991; Liff, 1997). "In the current . . . environment, efficiencies are no longer the solution to organizational problems," observe Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). ". . . The dominant problems . . . have become managing its exchanges and its relationships with the diverse interests affected by its actions" (p. 94). It is easy for decision-makers to get trapped in questions of efficiency, rather than questions of effectiveness. Strategic planning, because it requires an examination of the quality of what is produced, helps counter this tendency because it reminds administrators that the institution's short-term goals can defeat its long-term goals.

Higher Education Decision-Making

The argument is persuasive that strategic planning is grounded in the rational theory of decision-making. Unfortunately, an examination of the organization and decision-making culture of higher education reveals significant differences. This examination, like the description of strategic planning, is more uniform than true--size, reputation, presence of graduate students, and financial strength are among many factors which influence the structure and behavior of colleges and universities. Nevertheless, this simplified description below underscores the contrast between how decisions are made in colleges and universities and how decisions are made by strategic planners.

Higher education institutions qualify as professional organizations: at least 50% of the staff are professionals with five years or more of training, the primary goals of the organization are the creation and application of knowledge, and an organizational hierarchy may exist but the professionals are not involved in the hierarchy (Etzioni, 1964, pp. 77-78, 87). This last point is extremely important:

Universities have some bureaucratic characteristics, such as a formal division of labor, an administrative hierarchy, and a clerical apparatus. But they do not have other bureaucratic attributes; for example, there is no direct supervision of the work of the major group of employees, the faculty, and there are no detailed operating rules governing the performance of academic responsibilities. (Blau, 1973, p. 11) **[End Page 5]**

Thus, a "unique dualism in organizational structure" exists: the conventional administrative hierarchy and the faculty (or professionals) (Corson, 1960, cited in Birnbaum, 1988, p. 10). These two structures exist in parallel and have no consistent patterns in structure, delegation, or authority. For example, unlike a business, in which those high in administrative rank direct the activities of others, the professional world of higher education maintains a blurred staff-line structure. The professionals (the faculty) maintain superior authority to decide the major goals, while the authority of the administrators is limited to deciding the means to achieve those goals and to setting performance standards (Birnbaum, 1988; Etzioni, 1964; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1990, p. 28).

Thus, it should not be particularly surprising that this dual system of authority in the university often restricts administrative influence, especially in light of the "built-in rigidities of the faculty personnel system, the difficulty of reallocating funds fast enough, and the resiliency and tenacity of individual academic programs" (Hearn, 1988, p. 251; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1990; Tan, 1995). Further conflict is evident in the fact that "faculty are likely to be influenced more by internalized principles of academic freedom and ethical behavior and recognition of expertise, . . . than by a willingness to acquiesce to an administrator's power stemming from his or her particular rank or position" (Langfitt, 1989, p. 4; Tan, 1995).³ As professionals, academics insist on exclusive authority over their own work and demand self-regulation without administrative interference (Blau, 1973, p. 159). This "differentiation . . . *simultaneously* creates administrative problems and heightens the division between administration and faculty" (Blau, 1973, p. 153). Conflict is not resolved by recognizing the supremacy of administrative authority. In fact, "the president's total span of control . . . is . . . inversely related to the number of hierarchical levels in academic institutions, just as in government bureaus" (Blau, 1973, p. 57). Since there is not a single line of authority where decisions are made, "the authority of the president of the institution is limited by the need to achieve consensus" and by the need to maintain some semblance of control among "faculty members [who are] capable of making substantial academic contributions [and thus] are more important to their university or college than it is to them, because its academic standing depends on them, and because they have good opportunities elsewhere" (Blau, 1973, p. 163).

Obviously the presence of this dual hierarchy affects decision-making. To understand this, we first must examine more closely how traditional delineations of decision-making models in higher education differ in significant **[End Page 6]** ways from the traditional business/rational-based culture of decision-making. Scholars have traditionally used four models to describe decision-making in colleges and universities: the collegial, the political, the bureaucratic, and the anarchic (Birnbaum, 1988; Chaffee, 1983). The collegial model, for example, is how we traditionally describe decision-making within colleges and universities. This model assumes a shared sense of community and responsibility, consensus, localized responsibility for implementation, and informal feedback systems (Birnbaum, 1988; Chaffee, 1983). Since members of the collegial body are presumed to be equals, a hierarchy is not very important and no leader is appointed. Even the president is seen as the agent of the faculty, a first among equals, rather than as an independent actor (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 89). Another key factor of the collegial model is that, while consensus may exist relative to institutional goals, unlike rational decision-making, selecting alternatives is governed by the interests and experiences of the participants, i.e., usually the faculty. Faculty, acting together as peers, reason together toward their common goals--and their goals may not be congruent with the whole institution's goals (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 88; Chaffee, 1983; Tan, 1995).

At times, consensus and collegiality may not be apparent and a political model may provide a more accurate description of higher education decision-making. In such instances, power, coalition-building, and negotiation govern decision-making (Birnbaum, 1988; Chaffee, 1983). At first glance, this model sounds very similar to the business sector and rational decision-making. However, unlike many rational-based business structures, actors have multiple and conflicting goals which are defined primarily by their self-interests (Chaffee, 1983), not by the overarching institutional goals. Power does not rest on an appeal to organizational values. Rather, power is diffused, and developing a consensual, coherent culture is inhibited by the competing interests of different groups (such as administrators competing with faculty) within the institution (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 133).

In contrast, decision-making within the administrative component of higher education may be most accurately described by the bureaucratic model. This model has standard operating procedures, a clearly delineated hierarchy, and a systematic division of labor, rights, and responsibilities, all of which are enforced through a hierarchical control system (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 111; Weick, 1976). While this

description may be correct for the administrative hierarchy, it is not, however, an accurate description of the organization and culture of most colleges as a whole entity. That is, as noted earlier, the dual institutional hierarchy, the relatively flat hierarchy among the faculty, and the focus on consensus and expertise are clearly in conflict with the rational model of decision-making.

In fact, perhaps one appeal of the final model often used to describe decision-making in higher education is that it captures the presence, within **[End Page 7]** the same institution, of such contradictory features. Certainly it highlights how the decision-making culture within colleges differs from the rational-based assumptions of strategic planning. Called organized anarchy (Birnbaum, 1988; Chaffee, 1983; Cohen & March, 1986), this model describes an institution in which (a) goals are unclear, (b) the means of achieving goals are ambiguous, and (c) time and resources are scarce. An example of lack of goal clarity is the institutional mission statement. Even though the mission statement is supposed to guide the development of the curriculum, the college curriculum "in actuality often reflects primarily the interests of individual departments and faculty members" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 155). As Clark (1983) notes: "What sort of institution could subsume classical literature and social work, knit together physics and sociology, integrate archeology and zoology?" (p. 18) Mission statements focus on teaching, research, and public service as a "trinity of purposes," but this arrangement still leaves broad scope about what can be taught, researched, or considered public service (Clark, 1983, pp. 18-19).

A second feature of an "organized anarchy" is ambiguity about what technology should be used to achieve the mission and goals. What methods of teaching are effective, and under what circumstances, and, especially important, why? Because we do not have definitive answers to these questions, choices about technology tend to be based on trial and error, previous experiences, imitation, and inventions born of necessity (Cohen & March, 1986). This technological ambiguity is one reason for tolerating the lack of clear goals.

In an organized anarchy, most issues have low salience for most people. Therefore, participation in decision-making is erratic and fragmented. The total system has high inertia so that any action requiring coordination is not likely to be initiated. What items are discussed in the context of any particular decision depends less on the specific decision or problems than on "the timing of their joint arrivals and the existence of alternative arenas for exercising problems" (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 206; Chaffee, 1983). Decision outcomes tend to become separated from the formal decision-making process, a characteristic described by Cohen and March (1986), as "loose coupling."⁴ The college or university discovers what it prefers by seeing what it has already done, not by acting on the basis of *a priori* preferences (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 206; Gilbert, 1991). There may be a sophisticated management system in place on campus; but because of the loose coupling between problems and outcomes, and because of the existence of **[End Page 8]** the more powerful faculty hierarchy, that management system may operate at less than optimal effectiveness.

Another reason loose coupling is tolerated is because the resulting flexibility is congruent with the ethos of academic freedom (Lutz, 1982). Since the link between a specific problem and a specific decision is obscure, people can "have their cake and eat it too." For example, the faculty senate will make a decision about grade inflation, yet because the senate does not supervise or control the faculty, their behavior does not have to change. People can substitute belief for action (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 165). Loose coupling is one of the ways "academic institutions cope with the dilemma posed by the incompatibility of bureaucracy and scholarship" (Blau, 1973, p. 2).

Loose coupling is also tolerated because, in a complex and turbulent environment, each individual unit can be more sensitive and more responsive to changes in its external environment without causing conflicts in another unit (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Birnbaum, 1988). In terms of decision-making, then, this means that "at the institutional level [in colleges and universities], gaining commitment to productivity improvement will likely require decentralized budgeting and decision-making" (Mingle, 1989, p. 15; Schmidlein & Milton, 1990). This pattern is consistent with the academic model which "dictates that many of the tradeoffs between quality and quantity be resolved at the level of the individual faculty member" (Massy, 1990, p. 21; Blau, 1973, p. 60). Volkwein (1986) notes anecdotally that many within higher education are convinced that the "great" colleges and universities have traditionally been the least managed.⁵ Coordination is not accomplished by tightening linkages between hierarchical levels or by establishing more formalized control systems (Tolbert, 1985). Rather,

"if a college or university is to be effective . . . the looser must be the linkages between the management subsystem" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 46).

In summary, then, I argue that strategic planning can be viewed as rational-based decision making for six reasons. First, both rational theorists and strategic planners assume that overarching organizational goals exist and can be specified. Second, both assume that alternative courses of action can be identified and evaluated for their potential in achieving the stated goals. Third, decision-makers assume that a course of action can be chosen using logical and analytic procedures. The fourth similarity between rational decision-making theory and strategic planning is that, when contradictory goals exist, it is assumed that there is enough formal authority to eliminate the contradictions. Fifth, both strategic planners and rational theorists focus on tight links between organizational levels and between the organization and its environment. That is, interdependence is strong and is encouraged. **[End Page 9]** Finally, both believe that rationality is in part achievable by manipulating the organizational structure.

But within higher education, two hierarchies exist: faculty and administration. The members of those two hierarchies frequently do not agree on who should make decisions about goals or what the goals are. Finally, expertise determines how decisions are made, rather than a rational, systematic review of all alternatives; and loose coupling is tolerated, if not encouraged.

In light, then, of the cultural differences between styles of decision-making among strategic planners and higher education, how is the strategic planning process affected if those cultural factors are not considered? This was the focus of the case study of a strategic planning process to create a new school within Western University (a pseudonym).⁶ The planning process encompassed the institution's education programs. The case study methodology included an extensive review of the university's planning documents and nearly two dozen structured interviews with college faculty and administrators involved in and/or affected by the planning process.

Results

The planning process at Western University was not labeled "strategic" at the onset; however, during the data collection process, administrators agreed that the label was accurate. Thus, the results underscore how the use of a model, especially if not implemented carefully and thoughtfully, can have very unexpected results.

The planning process for Western University's education programs began in May 1982, when the president appointed an education of the university's Planning Academy. The subcommittee chair was from outside the Education Department; so were six of the eight faculty and staff subcommittee members. After thirteen months' work, the subcommittee transmitted its final report to the president and Planning Academy. The first report specified four principles that guided the subcommittee's deliberations: (a) the elimination of program fragmentation, (b) the pursuit of cooperative, interdisciplinary and systematic education research, (c) a desire to have a significant impact on the serious, identifiable problems of public education, and (d) the potential for significant national distinction within a reasonable amount of time. The subcommittee recommended establishing a separate school of education, along with research entities and public service groups. **[End Page 10]**

The Planning Academy discussed the report but took no action to implement the subcommittee's recommendations. A year later, the president appointed a second committee, again as a Planning Academy subcommittee. Again, the chair and six of eight members were from outside the Education Department. The president charged this committee with developing plans for implementing the first report. In December 1984, six months later, the committee reiterated the first committee's recommendation to establish a new school of education but recommended against creating the research and public service groups.

Nine months passed, then the president created a thirteen-member implementation committee chaired by the vice president for academic affairs. This committee was "to refine and implement the academic plans" described in the first two reports. Again, only two members were from the Education Department. Seventeen months later, this committee issued a draft proposal recommending again that

a separate school be established. The draft proposal circulated widely among campus officials and faculty, including the education faculty, was discussed in meetings with the faculty, and was reviewed by the appropriate campus committees. It was hoped that the board would review and approve the proposal, but it never reached the board. In fact, nothing substantive happened for nearly five years; the report just sat on a desk. At that point, ten years after the process first began, the board finally approved forming a separate school of education with its own dean. The president who had appointed all three subcommittees was retiring at this point, and speculation was rife that the long-awaited creation of this new school of education was to satisfy his wishes, not because the planning was so effective.

Analysis

The interviews and document reviews reveal that Western's planning efforts were marked by frustration, anger, and inaction, among both the education faculty and the various committee members. From my perspective, these negative results stem from Western's failure to implement a process consistent with the decision-making culture of higher education--specifically, one that acknowledged the differences between faculty and administrative styles of decision making.

Perhaps the most important problem in the planning process was the failure to create an environment in which faculty were encouraged or even allowed to participate. Unlike the business/rational-based approach, in which upper administration quite commonly mandates activities, higher education leaders cannot count on positional authority to ensure participation in the process, much less guarantee acceptance of resulting decisions. My analysis showed that regrettably little was done to involve the education [End Page 11] faculty, who would be directly affected by decisions, in the planning process's goals and purposes. As I noted earlier, the faculty I interviewed repeatedly mentioned the lack of commitment to the planning activities among the education faculty. Most individuals, especially education faculty, experienced anxiety, nervousness, disdain, alienation, and anger, though in varying degrees. Several faculty (both education and noneducation) viewed the onset of planning as a way of punishing the education department for not having implemented earlier changes desired by campus administrators. This reaction is not unreasonable; administrators had warned the department several years earlier that failure to implement new initiatives could result in the education program's elimination.

Many campus officials and education faculty believed that the education department needed major changes to achieve its institutional mission. Unfortunately, campus officials and education faculty did not agree on the nature of the problems; in fact, some education faculty members told me during interviews that they were not convinced any significant problems existed.

Obviously, the Education Department was divided, and faculty and administrators held emotionally charged opinions to which there were not necessarily clear answers. Furthermore, campus administrators and planners apparently initiated no activities to alleviate those emotions. For example, they did not explain how planning had improved programs in other units or even how planning, in general, helps colleges and universities achieve their mission and objectives. The sole gesture in that direction I have been able to find is that it promised to return faculty positions, lost to the department over the previous years due to attrition, if the department actively supported planning. The administration did not recognize that this incentive, though significant, was not enough to counter the negative emotions and perceptions caused by the faculty's exclusion from the planning process itself.

The campus administration also apparently failed to recognize the faculty's interest in the process of how a decision is arrived at as much as the content of the decision (i.e., emphasis on collegiality, thoroughness, carefulness, and expert-based review [Birnbaum, 1988; Etzioni, 1964]). For example, some faculty and administrators felt that, despite the directness of the committee charges, the repeated appointment of new committees implied that the administration had a specific goal in mind. When a committee's recommendations did not embody this hidden agenda, the administration simply appointed another committee until one came up with the "right" answer. There was no systematic or formal process of communicating with the Education Department faculty, individually or collectively, during the planning process, a fact that further exacerbated the suspicions. None of the education faculty I interviewed recalled that the planning committees [End Page 12] had ever solicited their reactions or views *before* a draft proposal was prepared. Only two education faculty served on each

committee, making them clearly a minority voice. Furthermore, neither the committees, the Education Department, nor the education faculty themselves who served on the committees viewed them as official department representatives. In fact, one person I interviewed shared the opinion that the exclusion of the faculty was intentional. The implementation (third) committee conscientiously tried to include the Education Department faculty, but it was too little, too late to counter the department's sense of alienation.

Yet another aspect of cultural differences was ignored: how long it takes to make decisions (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Within hierarchical, authoritarian structures, decisions can and frequently are made rather quickly. However, in faculty culture, change tends to be slower and more deliberate. None of the subcommittee assignments included the span of the planning process, so each committee was left on its own to determine how many years into the future its planning should cover. The implicit assumption seemed to be that the planners should recommend changes that could be implemented as quickly as possible. Even though there was no apparent confirmation of this perception, some faculty felt uneasy, believing that the administration wanted to implement a certain course of action without adequate study and deliberation. These interviewees felt that the succession of committees was not because of the need for study but because the committee recommendations didn't match what the administration wanted. It seems reasonable that some of the education faculty's anxiety during the planning process could have been mitigated if the administration had indicated its willingness to implement gradually (or at least study thoroughly) the recommended innovations, thus recognizing the lengthier process associated with faculty-based decision making. In short, a serious obstacle to the planning process was the administration's failure to adapt that process to the university's dual cultures.

In fairness, this harsh critique must be balanced with a discussion of what benefits were expected by severely limiting the education department's participation. First, Western University's administrators hoped that committees composed of people from outside the education department would enhance the legitimacy of the field of education. Increased respect would then enhance the legitimacy of augmenting the level of resources directed to education. They also intended that the participation of noneducation faculty members would emphasize education as an interdisciplinary effort with changes occurring not only in the department but campus wide. As a result, it was appropriate that the committees included representatives from throughout the campus community. As one interviewee who served on one of the three committees observed that sometimes one needs a whole new set of actors in order to implement needed changes. **[End Page 13]**

Next Steps

The case study reveals that Western U.'s faculty shared views regarding strategic planning typical at many colleges and universities (Baker & Markin, 1994; Gilbert, 1991; Prinvale, 1992, Schmidlein, 1990; Schmidlein & Milton, 1991). They felt that planning was a waste of time, not a legitimate part of the faculty role. This perception highlights one of the key cultural differences between administrators and faculty. Faculty members consider themselves individual entrepreneurs; they value their independence very highly. Faculty frequently see activities like strategic planning, particularly with its focus on hierarchical decision-making, as conflicting with their own goals and responsibilities. That is, strategic planning, in this view, is a business-based, rational process which has no place in higher education institutions governed by experts. Consequently, because of the institution's failure to acknowledge differences in styles and cultures of decision-making between administrators and faculty, the education initiative, which was expected to be completed within a year, resulted in significant alienation, anger, frustration, and a delay of almost a decade in its final implementation.

Can such problems be prevented? This research reveals three activities by the administration that might have ensured better alignment between the two cultures: (a) communicating the benefits of and reasons for planning, (b) creating opportunities for appropriate levels of faculty participation, and (c) articulating clear decisions related to the structure, scope, and span of planning.

Action 1: Communicating the benefits of, and reasons for, planning. Those in charge of planning know what they hope to attain, but the goal is not always so obvious to others (Liff, 1997). Nor, because of the traditional view that a college is not like a business, is it clear to others how or why such a business/rational-based process benefits higher education (Gilbert, 1991; Hurst, 1994; Robson, 1996; Tan, 1995). To counter this pessimism, planners should review the history of institutional problems

that were avoided as a result of strategic planning and communicate this information to the institution's members. Administration can create coalitions with key faculty leaders in support of the initiative, then conduct workshops and disseminate pertinent information about strategic planning, its benefits, why it is appropriate for colleges and universities, and how it should be done to be effective. An added benefit of such actions is that it provides evidence of claims that the administration (and the faculty leaders) supports the process (Chaffee & Sherr, 1992; Tan, 1995). Even more important, it powerfully communicates the administration's acknowledgement that faculty support--not just the president and board--is essential (Baker & Markin, 1994).

It is true, however, that going through these steps may still fail to convince faculty that strategic planning is needed (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). **[End Page 14]** Therefore, administrators should explicitly state the motives and goals of the strategic planning process (Schmidtlein, 1990; Shipengrover, 1996); if a certain course of action has already been decided, that should be made clear. Offering false choices when none exist does little to engender trust; and ex post facto "legitimization" of an already-made decision through planning may cause more mistrust and alienation than simply imposing the decision by fiat.

While higher education administrators are concerned with the relationship between the external environment and the college as a whole institution, faculty concerns often are discipline based (Baker & Markin, 1994; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1990; Tan, 1995).⁷ Another advantage of clarifying planning motives and goals is to put this conflict in perspective. Such a step is certainly preferable to ignoring the conflict and thus perpetuating the perception, as one interviewee stated, that "administrators don't care about what we think."

Action 2: Formulating appropriate levels of faculty participation. The typical view expressed within the planning literature is that, because planning is an avenue for uncovering conflicts, a strategic planning process that expects and encourages widespread participation is most beneficial (Cope & Delaney, 1991; Gilbert, 1991; Hurst, 1994; Johnson & Jonas, 1995; Liff, 1997; Marcus & Smith, 1996; Palola & Padgett, 1971; Weimar & Jonas, 1995). A distinctive feature of strategic planning is that it is a collective process of deciding on "the objectives of an organization, on changes in these objectives, and on the policies that are going to govern the acquisition, use, and disposition of resources" (Salloway & Tack, 1978). Most of the literature agrees that "widespread participation appears to be necessary for successful substantive planning" (Ringle & Savickas, 1983, p. 649). It certainly also makes sense that, since strategic planning at colleges and universities emphasizes educational policy issues, faculty participation is crucial (Baker & Markin, 1994; Weimar & Jonas, 1995). Finally, the benefits of participatory decision-making, particularly in industrial settings, have been studied extensively and are also relevant for strategic planning (Pateman, 1970).

There also is no doubt that Western University's failure to systematically involve the Education Department contradicted the faculty's decision-making culture and thus seriously undermined the effectiveness of the planning process. If the administration had permitted and encouraged the department's participation, the faculty, arguably, would have more willingly believed that the administration respected its culture. However, full-scale participation of all faculty, although consistent with the collegial model, is not necessarily the ideal. Pateman's (1970) explanation of the differences **[End Page 15]** between full and partial participation highlight why the latter may be preferable in higher education culture. In full participation, two or more people have equal power to determine the outcome or decision. In partial participation, one party can only influence the other party, but the other party has the authority to make the final decision. Partial participation thus appears more congruent with the reality of higher education. First, the hierarchical structure of a university is a reality--whether one likes it or not--that cannot be ignored. Power is unequally distributed within a university (Schmidtlein, 1990). Efforts to foster equality should continue, but ignoring the existence of inequality merely sets up planners and participants for frustration and failure. A partial participatory planning process recognizes that certain parties have greater authority and are unlikely to relinquish that authority willingly. The model also recognizes that decisions made now will affect students not yet enrolled and faculty not yet employed. Thus, administrators may justifiably impose decisions that they are convinced are necessary to protect future constituents.

Another disadvantage of full participation in planning is that such a process may not provide ways to resolve conflicts when consensus cannot be achieved. Within a university, diverse and conflicting

goals exist (Schmidtlein, 1990; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1990). Nor does the full-participation model include methods for resolving situations when the administrators cannot convince the participants to modify decisions which the administrators believe are seriously flawed and will undermine the long-range success (defined as achieving the stated goals/objectives) of the institution (Schmidtlein, 1990).

A partial participatory planning structure helps deal with these conflicts, however, by clarifying the existence of the other hierarchy--the administration (including the ultimate authority vested with the president, board, legislature, etc.). As Pateman (1970) notes, the partial participation model recognizes the boundaries of authority and responsibility among the different groups in the institution. It reminds people of their limited authority. While such candor may discourage their participation in planning, being honest about limits also encourages participants to achieve agreement rather than to relinquish what authority and influence they do possess because of unresolved disagreements.

The effectiveness of the partial participation model in planning is closely linked to the level of trust between the top executives and the institution's members. This fact further underscores the importance of developing a planning culture. If administrators have taken the time to inculcate "planful" attitudes, encourage risk-taking, and help establish a sense that everyone is working together to maximize the institution's achievement of its goals, then a significant step towards developing trust has been taken. (See, especially, **[End Page 16]** Shipengrover, 1996, and Tan, 1995, on why trust is so important.) The participants possess the information needed to make reasonable decisions. When trust exists and participation is encouraged, participants realize their ideas will be considered seriously during the decision-making process. They also understand that every idea will be scrutinized with the same seriousness as long as sufficient justification and documentation are provided. Top management must make it clear that participants should not waste time submitting and justifying ideas which are simply impossible, politically or otherwise, to consider.

Action 3: Deciding on the structure, scope, and span of planning. One reason planners focus on establishing a systematic planning structure is because it improves coordination and integration among the system's separate units. It gives the institution's leaders methods for managing and directing people's actions and for controlling the influence of idiosyncratic and selfish actions which, if left unmanaged, can impede achievements of to the institution's goals and mission. Within the dual hierarchical setting of colleges, however, these assumptions often are inappropriate because faculty and other staff may respond to the focus on control and hierarchy as patronizing. Such a reaction explains why it is very important for higher education administrators to assess carefully the kind of planning structure they create.

Planning literature discusses literally dozens of different planning models and structures. One structural issue to be determined is the scope and span of strategic planning. Creating an institution-wide scope of strategic planning solves the problem of excluding some constituencies but may mistakenly assume that faculty from different disciplines know and/or share the institution's overarching values and goals. The reality is that disciplinary parochialism often prevails--the attitude that one's personal field of expertise is the best arena in which to find solutions to problems (Keller, 1983). Unless steps have been taken to clarify these conflicting goals, an institution-wide planning process is more likely to uncover and/or create conflict than to achieve consensus (Schmidtlein, 1990; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1990).

Planning spans--how many years in the institution's future are the administrators planning for?--is another issue that seems easy to determine; but the cultural differences between faculty and administrators add factors that can complicate this decision (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). For example, market data and budgetary considerations are primary factors influencing decision-making. But faculty members will argue for including issues related to the impact on their own teaching and their own department, their expert opinions on what students need to learn and how society can benefit, and the time needed to engage and complete research. Perhaps this is **[End Page 17]** the arena in which the traditional conservatism (change takes a long time) is prominent. Thus, strategic planning designed to create change within a short period of time will almost certainly expose potential conflicts. One option is to ensure that administrators and planners make it clear that such changes are possible (we will acquire the needed resources; doing this will enable us to acquire extra funds for research, etc.). Another option is to put constraints on the planning process itself, i.e., set priorities and impose deadlines. In this manner, faculty may be convinced that administrators realize that the expenditure of

time and resources necessary for change inevitably conflicts with the myriad other demands on faculty (teaching, research, and service) which are more obviously critical for their own career.

Finally, an important step is deciding who will conduct the planning process. It could be a blue-ribbon committee, an administrative team, subcommittees of existing committees, task forces, or project groups. Will it be headed by an external coordinator or internal personnel? The point is that administrators must recognize that faculty support is often based in part on the perceived legitimacy of those who are involved. To what extent are experts involved in the process? At Western University, the process suffered terribly when participants in the planning process did not include faculty highly respected as experts in the field of decisions to be made, i.e., education department faculty.

Conclusion

This research does not intend to blame administration in general for problems associated with planning. Rather, the point is that, when both administrators and faculty ignore their cultural differences, the results are generally bad for the institution; this negative outcome can happen very easily when a business/rational-rooted process like strategic planning is conducted at an academic institution. Adapting the strategic planning process to the faculty/administration cultures should reduce the chances of repeating the problems experienced at Western University. Planned change is a deliberate process. To be successful, it must be organized and structured. Planners and administrators must take care that their planning process is congruent with the expert-based, consensual faculty decision-making culture. Only then can college and university administrators be more confident that their institution's planning will not generate the frustration, alienation, and anger that occurred at Western University. Only then can administrators be more assured that the goals of the planning process will be achieved effectively and efficiently.

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Notes

1. Definitions of success can vary; but generally, success is viewed as accomplishing the stated goals and objectives. (My thanks to an external reviewer for highlighting this point.)
2. The utilization during strategic planning of a technique called "claimant analysis" (King & Cleland, 1978) or "quadrant analysis" (Lynn, Carver, & Virgo, 1996) reflects this belief. Claimant or quadrant analysis is a process for determining the demands and needs of external environmental groups.
3. "The better the formal qualifications of the faculty in an academic institution, the less likely are faculty members to express allegiance to it [the institution]" (Blau, 1973, p. 120).
4. An organization is loosely coupled when the linkages between structural characteristics and actual behavior are not present (Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Pfeffer, 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Schmidlein & Milton, 1990).
5. This article, however, presents data contradicting this view.
6. To protect identities, references to campus documents and titles are masked and all identifying material is excluded from the bibliography.
7. See Gouldner's (1957) landmark article discussing the difference between faculty "locals" and faculty "cosmopolitans"; also see Becher (1987).

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