

# EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

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# International Society for Educational Planning

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## From the Editors

*The best laid schemes of Mice and Men oft go awry,  
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,  
For promised joy!*

Robert Burns (1785)

Educators may often correlate their experiences with education planning endeavors to the above admonishment made by Robert Burns in 1785. Sometimes it seems that the more we plan for success in educational pursuits the less it occurs in the long run and the more frustrated or “jaded” we become about the entire planning process leaving us grief and pain for the promised joy! However, this issue of *Educational Planning* contains five articles from different global contexts written by authors who have acute perspectives and robust experiences working with and researching about the impact of strategic planning paradigms with varying degrees of success. They provide key references that serve as benchmarks related to an array of diverse ways to create, implement, and evaluate educational plans that provide promise to improve education. But, these authors also provide specific examples and insightful analyses of education plans that went awry so that readers may reflect about the most appropriate planning approaches to employ given their contextual situations and planning goals.

Robert Beach and Ronald Lindahl, both long time International Society for Educational Planning leaders and well-respected professors of educational administration in the United States, provide an excellent history of planning with a focus on educational strategic planning. They provide an insightful review of the planning process and examine planning paradigms designed to explore and create organizational change including: Rationalism, Incrementalism, Mixed Scanning, and Developmental Planning. Their article specifically assists planners in recognizing that there is no one “best” planning model to use in all situations but that there are valuable strategic planning templates that may be employed to reduce the risks of well intentioned plans going awry.

Assefa Beyene Bassa, a 2012-2013 Fulbright Scholar studying at Niagara University, completed his Ph.D. in 2014 in Education focusing in Higher Education Management from Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, India. His article is based on his Ph.D. research about the strategic planning processes used in higher education in Ethiopia. His research identifies that the strategic plans to improve the quality of higher education in Ethiopia were unsuccessful due to: lack of stakeholder participation; lack of critical assessment of the external environment; lack of effective communication; lack of alignment with university priorities and lack of monitoring, follow-up, and feedback systems. His article articulates the salient problems too often associated with strategic planning not only in developing countries but worldwide. His research provides valuable data based evidence of the need to focus on the key human aspects of change and his recommendations provide a valuable guide to make strategic planning more successful in all contexts.

Emine Babaoglan’s article provides insight into the strategic planning state requirement for all K-12 schools that currently exists in Turkey. This strategic planning requirement for schools commenced in 2010 and mandated that all K-12 schools embark on a strategic planning process. She contends that the strategic planning process itself was often misunderstood at the local levels and, consequently, practical problems arose related to implementing this centralized fiat to improve schools via a nationwide planning approach. She synthesizes the research of several scholars from Turkey as well as worldwide and correlates the problems with implementing strategic planning in Turkey to the following key factors: lack of awareness at the local levels, lack of stakeholder engagement in the process, and lack of effective communication about the general goals of strategic planning and the specific objectives to be accomplished at the local level. She concludes her article with recommendations for greater cooperation between K-12 schools, universities, and government officials. Her article has significance to improve nationwide educational planning not only in Turkey but in other countries as well.

Rafal Piwowski's article provides a comprehensive historical review and analysis of the major approaches and outcomes of educational planning in Poland at all education levels since the end of World War II. He addresses the key philosophical and pragmatic differences between approaches to planning that were employed in Poland during the state controlled Marxist-Leninist period and those employed since the 1980's. He captures the essence of the problems associated with state-controlled educational planning as he provides evidence of the failure of some of those plans. But, he also emphasizes the fact that even though there was centralized "plan failure" in the past; today that is considered a good thing for Poland because there is more of a planning emphasis on local control and contextual empowerment to improve education. This strategic planning orientation may not have been so readily adopted had the previous state controlled plans not been discontinued in the early 1970's. He concludes that effective educational planning in Poland, and globally, needs to be historically targeted, pragmatic, and flexible yet based on the best interests of children for their future.

Timothy Law Snyder's article provides examples of strategic planning issues in higher education academic settings. His article contains acute insights on the strategic planning process based on his pragmatic experiences in strategic planning in higher education. He reiterates the key concept that any strategic plan needs to be carefully planned and robust enough to weather any unexpected circumstances that may "derail" various aspects of the plan or the entire plan itself. He provides specific strategic planning action items and recommended cautions that are applicable and adaptable to any organizational situation. However, he contends that these actions and cautions must be addressed so that the strategic planning process does not go awry as has often been the case of educational planning in higher education as his examples comprehensively identify.

Therefore, these five articles enable readers to collect historical information, research-based findings, and pragmatic experiences at both the K-12 and higher education levels from various diverse context perspectives about strategic planning in education. The editors hope that readers will reflect about these articles and incorporate the recommendations presented by the authors into their respective planning processes and programs so that Robert Burns' admonish about the "best laid plans" will, eventually, no longer apply in education.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Emine Babaoglan** is Associate Professor of Educational Science in the Faculty of Education at Bozok University in Turkey. She has served as a teacher and supervisor for sixteen years and is a researcher in the field of educational management, educational leadership, and educational supervision.

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**Robert H. Beach and Ronald A. Lindahl** are professors and have been employed by several universities including, most recently, in Alabama State University's Doctoral program in Educational Leadership Policy and Law. Their major publishing interest is related to theory in educational planning and policy. They have worked in educational settings in the United States, Canada, Guam, Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, England, Spain and Malawi. Over the past 30 years they have authored numerous articles and book chapters on educational planning (rhbeach@charter.net and rlindahl@alasu.edu).

**Rafal Piwowarski** is professor of Educational Policy at Academy of Special Education in Warsaw, Poland. He is the author of over a dozen books and over 160 articles, chapters and other smaller publications in educational policy, rural education, and conditions for educational achievements of students. He has been for many years researcher at the Institute for Educational Research, Warsaw (since 2007 national project manager of TALIS, great, international survey devoted to teachers and school principals). Till 2014 he has worked at University in Bialystok, where he was twice elected as the vice-dean of the Faculty of Education.

**Timothy Law Snyder** is currently a Professor in Loyola's Department of Mathematics and Statistics at Loyola University Maryland. He recently served, until July 2014, as the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Loyola University Maryland, arriving in 2007 year following six years as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Fairfield University. Prior to his arrival at Fairfield in 2001, Dr. Snyder was Dean of Science and the Wright Family Distinguished Professor of Computer Science at Georgetown University. Dr. Snyder's research has concentrated on theoretical/mathematical computer science, with specialties in combinatorial optimization; computational geometry; and digital signal processing and computer music.

# A Discussion of Strategic Planning as Understood through the Theory of Planning and its Relevance to Education

Robert H. Beach and Ronald A. Lindahl

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to provide an introduction to strategic planning in education, including basic principles, templates, and factors that led to its rise to become a recognized approach in educational planning, and in the issues that have led to increasing reliance on other approaches to educational planning.*

## PLANNING THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Planning's beginning is clouded in a history that extends backward for at least seven millennia, and, perhaps, depending on one's definition and semantics, 100,000 years. If an ancestor, on picking up a stone, saw in that stone a spear point and proceeded to shape the stone so as to bring out that spear point, was this an act of planning? Although it may not be understood as such, everything people do is plan based. This does not mean that people always create a formal plan. Does one even need to comprehend planning to plan? Whatever the answer, one who is planning may or may not understand what planning is. So, historically, planning really has no known beginning.

So what is planning? It is best considered to be a design process by which a plan, model, or template is developed that guides future actions to achieve a goal(s). It is not just strategic planning. As this article will explore, strategic planning is but one form among several forms of planning.

However, the design process and its output, the plan, are often confused. This is a result of the process and the plan being simultaneously undertaken and essentially viewed as the same thing in a situation where the intent is to create one plan and use it once. This is generally the situation, but not always. With more complex approaches to planning evolving over time, the understanding grew that planning is only one element in a series including implementation and institutionalization that creates a process of organizational change and reform. In education, various categories of templates or models exist for dealing with concerns related to different goal achievement issues. Planning's historic emergence is germane to this discussion where, rather than only strategic planning, the more intricate design of plans with different methodological approaches should be understood.

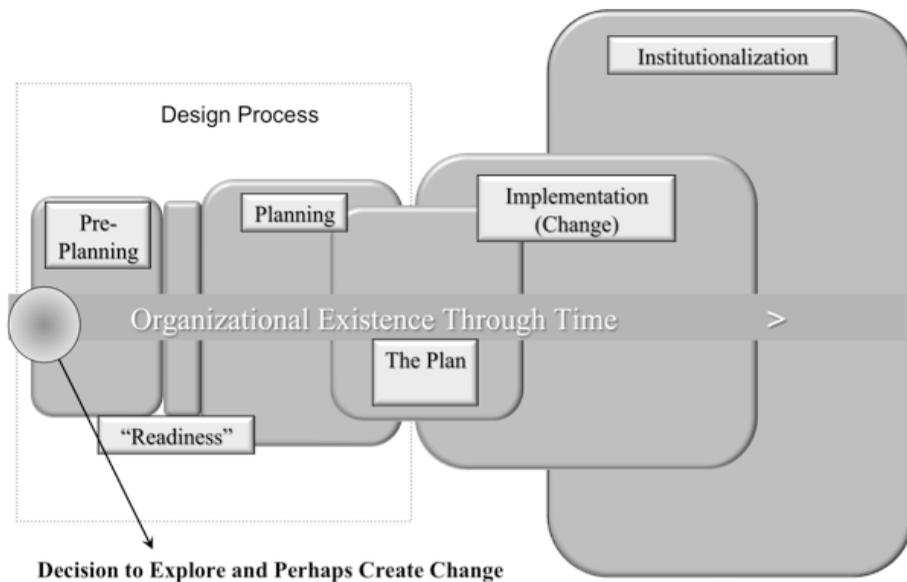
So, we tend to begin any discussion of planning history with something that has been created physically, is recognizable, and is to some extent enduring. Buildings are a good starting point in that they obviously require some basic reasoned planning. One of the first buildings built that most assuredly called for cognitive planning was the structure known as Barnenez in France in 4850 BC (*Barnenez*, n.d.). Note that this large stone building is twice as old as the Parthenon. In 2560 BC, the Giza pyramid of Cheops was constructed -- at 20 times the mass of the Empire State building. Serious planning certainly was involved.

Planning began to receive strong emphasis in the management literature with both Frederic W. Taylor (1911), an American engineer publishing *Principles of Scientific Management* that proposed the establishment of planning shops in factories as a means to create greater organizational efficiency, and in 1916, when Henri Fayol (1916, 1949), a French mining engineer, wrote *General and Industrial Management*. In this book he stressed planning as one of the five key roles of administrators. He defined planning (*prevoyance*) as the forecasting of future trends, the setting of objectives, and the coordination and harmonization of the organization's efforts to achieve those objectives. He called for the development of timelines, action plans, and budgets necessary for the implementation of the plan. He also advocated for the participation of various stakeholders in the planning process. The work of both men led to ideas such as increasing organizational performance through better planning, and to the development of tools such as the Gantt chart.

With time, old traditional ideas have been tested and new concepts have emerged. Theory has informed practice; however, to a far greater extent, practice has forced theory into a more field-

oriented posture. Modern educational planning, as considered here, begins around the period of World Wars I and II and is oriented toward managing institutional change. This was a period when soldiers returning home applied much of what they had learned about military planning and many of its related tools. Flowcharts, task analysis, risk analysis, and planning's twin, decision making, along with other planning tools, became known and underwent widespread use. This period set the stage for dramatic growth in the application of planning generally and the expansion of applications of the process in the 1960s and 1970s. The soldiers also brought home a term -- strategic planning.

A simplified graphic including planning and its follow-on activities is illustrated in Figure 1. The illustration is presented in a linear form for clarity, even though most would agree that the process is far from linear, folding back on itself and twisting in response to increased understanding of emerging difficulties and new knowledge. Also, for the sake of clarity and simplicity, the necessary recursive feedback loops are not depicted.



**Figure 1. A simple, basic change model.**

The model relating to education begins with a pre-planning phase, in which the school determines if a need exists for change and what it might take to effect that change. It examines the nature of the desired changes and determines which planning approach would be the most effective and efficient in beginning a goal achievement process. The process then blends into a readiness phase; there is no clearly defined delineation or separation among the various phases. In the readiness phase, the school examines its capacity and willingness to plan, implement, and institutionalize the proposed change(s). It assesses the scope and reasonableness of change, and administrative support for the change, the organizational culture and climate, the leadership, staff skills and needed staff development, institutional history and current involvement with change efforts, the clarity of the vision, goals, and objectives, the ability to observe the innovation in other settings, access to consultants, and its time constraints. A set of frequently noted potentially troublesome variables is found, further along in Table 1. If these variables, on balance, seem to be positive and are manageable, it moves on to the planning phase.

At this point, attention shifts to forming a clear vision of the change(s) desired and a set of goals to accomplish that vision. The major questions to be answered at this point include:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we?

- Where do we want to go?
- What steps must we take in order to get there?
- What time and resources will we need to take those steps?
- How will we measure our progress or success?

Alternative goals and means for attaining these goals are examined and eventually prioritized. This then leads to the development of the plan.

This phase is action planning and begins with a task analysis. Task analysis is a process of determining what objectives should be set to attain the organization’s goals or to move it forward in the direction of an agreed-upon vision. These objectives are then analyzed to determine what jobs and/or activities are needed to achieve the goals. Once this has been accomplished, the challenge becomes one of identifying the relationships among the tasks. The final activity of task analysis is grouping the tasks into major, conceptually integrated sections of work. Once the task analysis has been completed, the next step in the action planning process is the scheduling of activities and the budgeting of resources to those activities. This eventually allows the planners to develop time estimates, assign personnel, track progress, and understand the scope of the process. At this point the planners should revisit the following questions:

- Can we afford this?
- Will it be worth the cost?
- Do we have the needed skills and resources, or could we acquire them?
- Can we finish in time for the project to produce the desired results?
- Shall we proceed?

The actual action plan often takes a format similar to that depicted in Figure 2.

Sample School Improvement Process Action Plan Format						
Task / Activity	Person(s) Responsible	Begin Date	End Date	Resources Needed	Resources Available	Resources to be Obtained and Sources

Sample School Improvement Process Action Plan Format (continued)				
Task / Activity	Products or Evidence of Progress to be Assessed	Person(s) Responsible for the Assessment	Assessment Methodology	Assessment Due Date(s)

Figure 2. A sample action plan format.

With this plan established, the process moves on to the implementation or change phase, in which the activities of the action plan are carried out and assessed. The progress made in carrying out this action plan determines the extent to which it may be necessary to return to the planning phase, or even to the pre-planning phase, for revisions. If the desired changes are successful and widely accepted among the stakeholders, the school gradually begins to institutionalize them into its climate, culture, and routines.

## TYPES OF PLANNING

Not all planning processes are alike. Consider what a quick search for “planning” through the book section of Amazon.com turns up: Facilities Planning, Fiscal Planning, Menu Planning, Party Planning, Project Planning, Town Planning, Wedding Planning, and others. Each type is obviously different and each has at least one commercial publication available. This gives rise to different theories related to the nature of the design process. However, all result from an understanding that the plan should actually be capable of being implemented. The overriding question becomes: Can this plan be implemented? This point addresses the most important cause of planning failures and always must be a concern. Historically, guidance for design processes falls into several different classifications based largely on the various approaches to be used based on implementation, resources, and time. These processes range from tightly management-controlled plans to more loosely people-oriented approaches. There are many philosophies as how to conduct the planning process.

The past century has seen educational planning evolve and develop into a recognized field of study. During this period, many process models, principally four, have been articulated as to how the future of educational organizations can and/or should be changed for the better. The four models are well defined, understood and are sufficiently different from each other that they can be designated as planning paradigms. These paradigms are known as Rationalism, (Comprehensive and Bounded), Incrementalism, Mixed or Environmental Scanning, and Goal Free or Developmental Planning (see Beach, 2004). Each has brought a progression of insights as how the implementation of formal planning can bring about real organizational change. These, as noted, are:

### *Comprehensive Rationalism -- Simon (1950 & 1965)*

Very Goal Driven: Obsolete but Still Found in Use

The earliest articulation of rational planning has become known as Comprehensive Rationalism. In this model, goals and means are clearly defined. A logical series of steps, often linear, is typically proscribed (a generic example can be found at Figure 3). Ends and means are assumed to be separable and capable of eliciting widespread organizational support. The postulates of this theory require that all solutions to the problems of the proposed change are examined and that the best solution be chosen. Simon (1950, 1965) proposed three objections to any pure form of this model. First, can all solutions really be examined? Second, the future consequences of any plan can only be assumed. Third, given human psychological issues such as bounding (limiting the problems parameters), biases, and the form of the problem’s presentation and its framing, memory recall, etc., raise questions as the true rationality of educational organizations.

In reality, the complexities of each school’s changing environment, internal strengths and weaknesses, readiness for change, the requirements of complete comprehensiveness, culture, needs, and stakeholders make this a vastly intricate process. Initially, this was the appropriate template for strategic planning. However, current ideas have made the template more concerned with creating greater stakeholder involvement. This is especially true in education.

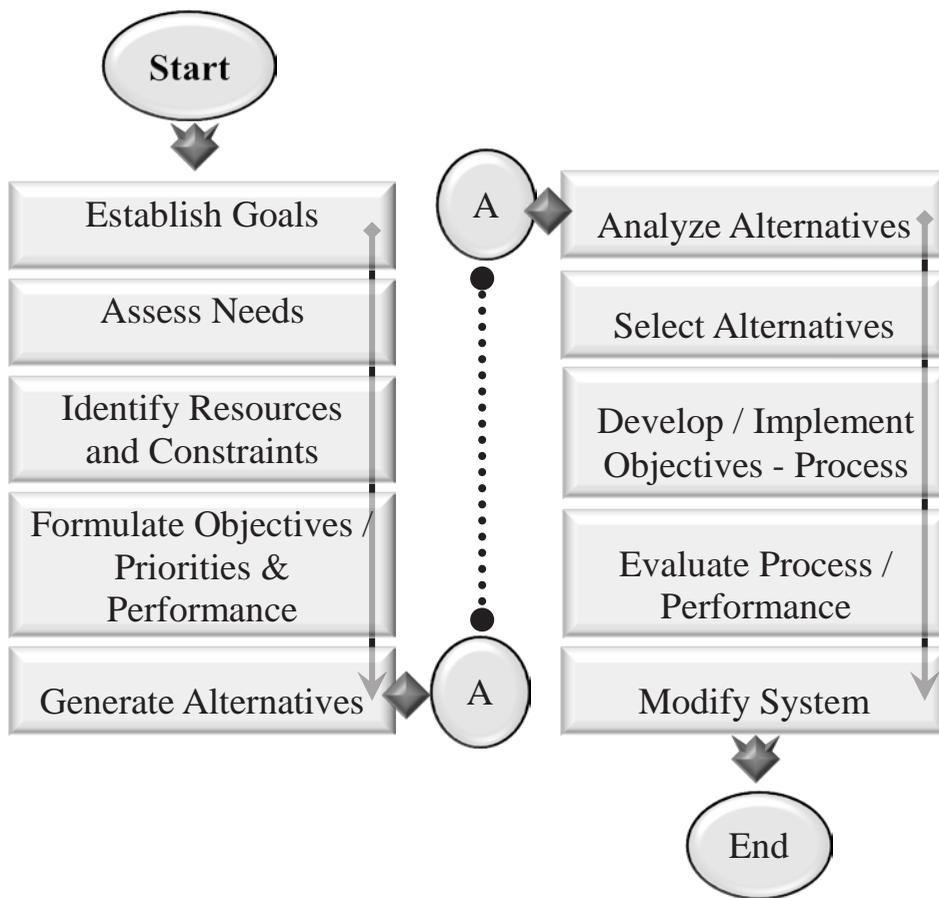


Figure 3. Basic rational planning process format.

### *Bounded Rationality – March and Simon (1958, 1982)*

Highly Goal Driven

Moves to weaken the postulates of pure rationality were made when March and Simon (1958, p. 169) proposed what has become known as Bounded Rationality. This approach to planning recognizes the impossibility of articulating all possible solutions from a potentially infinite set as the means to select the optimum (best) solution: the best always may be the next solution chosen for examination. A feasible solution becomes acceptable. However, even creating and executing feasible plans on an unknowable future is hazardous and the longer the time frame for a plan the more hazardous success becomes, which may explain the near disappearance of what were known as long-range planning models. Bounded rationalism now represents the most frequently used of the rational models.

Although bounded rationalism does restrict the choice of planning models as a means of quality improvement, relative to comprehensive rationalism, this does not free those choices from the problems inherent in all rational models. Instead, it posits that in most cases, attention is best focused on a restricted set of core issues, conditions, and alternatives that lie within the range of feasibility of the organization and its stakeholders. This, again, is not linear and is presented here as a classic step model.

### *Incrementalism -- Lindblom (1959)*

Goal Driven

This model minimizes the amount of information and decision-making needed. Basically, it accepts the status quo as the baseline and calls for small (incremental) advances in the direction of organizational goals. Initially this was known as the model of Successive Limited Comparisons, AKA *Muddling Through*. In this formulation, the planner builds on past and current achievements

and proceeds in small incremental steps. This is viewed as the art of the possible. Global goals are seen as flexible, changing, and achievable only, if at all, by small incremental steps taken in the direction of such goals. The planner may consider past policies and plans and make marginal changes to the ongoing plan for a future course of action.

### *Mixed Scanning -- Etzioni (1967)*

#### Somewhat Goal Driven

Etzioni (1967) saw the value of combining the concepts of the incremental and bounded rational models in an organization's overall planning process, capitalizing on the strengths of each. This mixed-scanning model reflects Etzioni's recognition that an organization's planning process need not be monolithic. There are aspects of the planning process that may well best be served by the incremental model; however, for other aspects a bounded rational planning process is more appropriate.

### *Developmental or Goal Free -- Clark (1981)*

#### Relaxed Goals

This model should not be confused with the same term used in national development programs. The developmental planning model is in reality strictly a planning model that focuses less on identifying highly specific, quantifiable, organizational goals and the unified action to attain those goals than on identifying the shared positive values, beliefs, and vision of the organization and then promoting a variety of individual and group efforts that are consonant with those values, beliefs, and vision. When working from a Developmental or Goal-Free model, the planner perceives goals as only one element in the mix of organizational change concerns. To this extent, the process is non-rational in the sense that organizational change is not seen as exclusively achieved through primary goal attainment. Stakeholders will disagree over goals when some individuals are lessened by the impact of those goals. This gives rise to resistance, either openly expressed or held privately by a subset of stakeholders. Rather, the model suggests that by delaying goal formulation, more time is available to resolve tensions and potential goal conflicts by their adjustment following stakeholder input. Goals that prevent or inhibit implementation are not desirable, especially in education.

Although, in an effort to distinguish developmental from rational planning, Clark referred to this model as goal-free, this term can be deceptive to school leaders not well versed in this model. Organizations that employ developmental planning have goals; they are just less specific and can be articulated further along in the process as a means of generating greater stakeholder involvement than in those organizations using more rational planning models.

## CHOOSING A PLANNING APPROACH

This is an important issue that should be resolved prior to executing the specific plan(s) that will be used. A logical place for resolving this issue is at the readiness phase of the process. Each of the models discussed has strengths and weaknesses that impact the probability for success. The variable at Table 1, Item 16, can guide this effort. A classic example is found in organizations that have undergone repeated and unsuccessful attempts at change, perhaps the typical three or four year reform cycle. This is a very different organization than one that has had successful, little, or no experience of this nature. The planning process in the former is at risk of quiet failure; the latter is a far better bet. In a similar way, as in Table 1, item 11, how able is the planner to free up staff time?

Mackay (2004) proposed a schema in which rational planning models, which includes strategic planning, would be used in predictable environments with stable and clear goals. Another approach, which seeks to identify common ground and avoids areas of potential conflict, would be used in clear, predictable environments with ambiguous or unstable goals. Incremental planning would be the preference for complex, unpredictable environments with stable, agreed-upon goals. Finally, Mackay called for inspirational leadership as the planning approach for complex, unpredictable environments with unstable or conflicting goals.

## HISTORY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Initially, strategic planning was considered as a rational, very goal-oriented, process that produced plans of a similar nature. Over time this has changed to a more flexible view that seeks greater stakeholder involvement.

It is widely considered to have its roots in the military of Ancient Greece (Bayuk, 2012; Blackerly, 1993; Young, n.d.). Each of the ten Greek tribes annually elected a *strategos* to head its regiment. At the battle of Marathon, in 490 B.C., these *stratego*i served as a council to the ruler (Blackerly, 1993). In 1916, Nelson P. Lewis published his seminal book related to strategic planning, *Planning of the Modern City*. In 1920, the Harvard Business School developed the Harvard Policy Model, forerunner to the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis model that lays at the heart of many strategic planning models today (Bayuk, 2012). In the 1950s, Igor Ansoff, known as the father of strategic management, developed the Product, Market, Growth Matrix, which employed many of the principles of strategic planning (Bayuk, 2012). In the 1950s and 1960s, the Department of Defense adopted related planning tools, such as the Planning-Programming, Budgeting System (PPBS). Through the 1960s, virtually every Fortune 500 Company, and many smaller companies, adopted strategic planning (Blackerly, 1993). In the 1970s, this expanded to include Management by Objectives (MBO) and Zero-based Budgeting (Young, n.d.). Industry also adopted the strategic planning approach in the 1970s, spurred on by the Boston Consulting group's Product Portfolio Model and Harvard Business School's Michael Porter Five Forces Analysis Model (Bayuk, 2012). In the late 1980s, both the American Association of School Administrators and the American Society for Curriculum and Development promoted strategic planning. In 1996, the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium mandated that school leaders use strategic planning (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). In 1999, the National Baldrige Quality Program for Education strongly implied the necessity of strategic planning by its awardees (Young, n.d.).

### *Definition of Strategic Planning*

There is no standard, agreed-upon definition of strategic planning. Drucker (1993) viewed it as a process of entrepreneurial and methodical decision making with the maximum knowledge possible of the future and the assessment of results to targets in a cybernetic feedback process. Young (n.d.) noted that it is a responsive, long-term policy tool based on benchmarks, capabilities, and needs. One simplistic definition is, "Strategy, it turns out, is really about trying to work out a sensible way to get from one stage to the next (Why a strategy?, 2013, p. 3). A more complete definition comes from the Balanced Scorecard Institute (n.d.): strategic planning is an organizational management activity that is used to prioritize, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes/results, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. Effective strategic planning articulates not only where an organization is going and the actions needed to make progress, but also how it will know if it is successful.

### *Benefits of Strategic Planning*

Numerous authors tout the benefits of strategic planning. Zuckerman (2012) noted that with rapidly changing technology, increasing competition, and a shortage of well-prepared professionals, there is a need for strategic planning to provide for contingency planning, for it affords the organization with "a clear self-concept, specific goals, and guidance and consistency in decision making" (p. 2). It helps leaders understand the present and think about the future, recognizing the signals of pending change. It improves vertical and horizontal communication and encourages innovation and change. Fogg (1994) posited that it: secures the future; provides a roadmap, direction, and focus; sets priorities; allocates resources; establishes measures; gathers impact and ideas; generates commitment; and coordinates actions. Axson (2010) added that it increases flexibility, simplifies planning by removing certain options, and retains its relevance in good times and bad. In higher education, Hinton (2012) favored strategic planning as it provides a forum for campus-wide conversations about important decisions.

### *Templates of Strategic Planning*

There seems to be an infinite variety of strategic planning models and templates, many ad hoc with little broad support, but there is considerable overlap among them. Lins (n.d.) specified some of these similarities: appropriate people involved, effective use of time, clear view of intended outcomes, implementation of actions, systematic evaluation of purposes, and regular review and revision of the plan and action steps. Lins went on to identify various specific templates of strategic planning, including Vision-Based, Goal-Based, Issues-Based, Alignment (of Mission with Resources), Scenario Planning, Organic or Self-Organizing, and Real-Time Planning. Other examples can be found in McNamara (nd) who also discusses models such as issues-based strategic planning, organic strategic planning, etc.

One of the most commonly used strategic planning templates in education has been Cook's 1990 model. Cook has used this template to lead strategic planning processes in over 1,200 schools and districts across the U.S., and continues to do so today (Cook, 1995). Countless other schools and districts have followed this template through the use of his books. This template calls for the following steps:

- Determine the organization's fundamental convictions, values, and character – its beliefs.
- Describe the unique purpose for which the organization exists and the specific function it performs - its mission.
- Determine the management pronouncements that establish the parameters within which the organization will accomplish its mission – its strategic policies.
- Determine the characteristics that contribute to the ability of the organization to achieve its mission – its strengths.
- Determine the characteristics that limit the ability of the organization to achieve its mission – its weaknesses.
- Determine the arrangement of authority and responsibilities among people within the organization – its organizational structure.
- Determine what other entities successfully attempt to fill the same need as the planning organization – its competition.
- Examine those forces that an organization has little or no control over.
- Express the desired, measurable end results for the organization – its objectives.
- Determine the broadly stated means of deploying resources to achieve the organization's objectives – its strategies.
- Outline the tasks required to implement that program or strategy, the person responsible for each task, the due date for the completion of each task, and an analysis of the benefits and costs for the specific action plan.

Another popular strategic planning template, particularly in higher education, is Bryson's (1988) process for public and non-profit organizations. This template consists of eight steps quite similar to Cook's:

- Development of an initial agreement concerning the strategic planning effort.
- Identification and clarification of mandates.
- Development and clarification of mission and mandates.
- External environmental assessment.
- Internal environmental assessment.
- Strategic issue identification.
- Strategy development.
- Description of the organization in the future.
- Development of actions and decisions to implement the strategies.
- Evaluation of the results.

### *The Decline of Strategic Planning in Education*

As early as 1991, Kaufman and Herman wrote that strategic planning is in danger of becoming just an educational fad. Mintzberg (1994) wrote a voluminous, well-documented text entitled *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. Similar questions were raised by Miech (1995).

In part, this decline stems from the lack of quality research that links strategic planning to organizational performance, e.g., student achievement on standardized examinations (Basham & Lunenburg, 1989; Zuckerman, 2012). Also, Green (2012) noted that 60% of organizations do not link strategic planning to budgeting, 75% do not link employee incentives to strategies, 86% of business owners and managers spend less than one hour per month discussing strategy, and 95% of a typical workforce do not understand their organization's strategy. The very term strategy has been so overused and misused that many consider it meaningless (*Why a strategy is not a plan*, 2013). Zuckerman (2012) continued this thought, concluding that strategic planning is not strategic, but rather is ritualistic and reductionist. As Axson (2010) stated, "Today you can define strategy just about any way you like, and that is a large part of the problem" (p. 1).

### *Why Strategic Planning Does Not Always Lead to the Desired Results*

The Natural Resources Management Gateway (n.d.) provides an extensive list as to why strategic plans often fail:

- Failure to understand the customer and why they come to you;
- Not determining whether or not there is a real need for the product or service;
- Inadequate or incorrect marketing research;
- Inability to predict environmental reaction – what will competitors do, will government intervene?
- Over-estimation of resource competence;
- Failure to develop new employee and management skills;
- Failure to coordinate;
- Inadequate reporting and control relationships;
- Organizational structure not flexible enough;
- Failure to obtain senior management commitment;
- Failure to get management involved right from the start;
- Failure to obtain sufficient company resources to accomplish the task;
- Failure to obtain employee commitment – new strategy not well explained to employees, no incentives given to workers to embrace the new strategy;
- Under-estimation of time requirements;
- No critical path analysis done;
- Failure to follow the plan – no follow through after initial planning, no tracking of progress against plan;
- No consequences for above, (p. 2)

Obviously, this list is best suited for competitive business environments, but many of its elements are common reasons why strategic planning in education often does not lead to success. In fact, from a business perspective, the list is about the same as that found in most defined planning processes including those presented in this paper.

Similarly, Zuckerman (2012) posited that strategic planning often fails to involve the appropriate people; is conducted independent of financial planning; suffers from analysis paralysis; fails to address difficult, critical issues; fails to achieve consensus; lacks flexibility; and ignores resistance to change. Mackay (1994) discussed the fact that analysis does not necessarily lead to synthesis.

Beach and Lindahl (2004) raised specific questions of strategic planning's relevance to educational planning:

- Are educational environments truly rational?

- Are schools free to alter their missions fundamentally?
- To what extent can schools adequately define their organization’s values and visions?
- Is strategic planning an efficient model for use in public schools?
- Does the nature of school allow significant resource redirection?
- Is the nature of implementing change in schools compatible with strategic planning?

The authors of this article propose that for strategic planning to be effective in an organization, the following factors, as presented in Table 1, must be present:

Table 1

*Common impacting variables found in the planning and change literature*

1	Acceptable Staff Skills	15	No Major and Few Physical Constraints
2	Adequate Learning Time	16	Non-Negative Experiences with Change
3	Adequate Plan Flexibility	17	Ongoing Aid, Training, & Staff Development
4	Adequate Preparedness for Change	18	Ongoing Post-change Funding
5	Adequate Resources	19	Openness in Peer Consultation
6	Administrative Support	20	Positive Collegial Relationships
7	An Orderly Organization	21	Positive Communication Capacity
8	Available Resources and Materials	22	Positive Faculty Demographics (age, gender)
9	Clear Goals and Expectations	23	Provision for External Consultants (if needed)
10	Definitions for Proposed Activities	24	Recognized Teacher Competence
11	Extra Faculty Time and Energy	25	Stakeholder Access to Observe Innovations
12	Few Competing Change Programs	26	Supportive Institutional Culture and Climate
13	High Levels of Faculty/Staff Education	27	User Commitment
14	Manageable Size of the Change Effort		

The contextuality of strategic planning was also discussed by McNamara (n.d.), who called for planners to examine the purpose of the planning, their organization’s history with planning, the organizational culture, and the organization’s environment. However, the greatest description of why strategic planning has declined in popularity may be found in the words of former world heavyweight boxing champion, Mike Tyson: “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.”

## CONCLUSIONS

Strategic planning in education certainly continues to play an important role; however, there is growing recognition among educational leaders that it is not the only approach, nor is it appropriate in all situations. As Beach and Lindahl (2004) concluded, “The coalescence of policy around a single planning form may not be in public education’s best interests” (p. 1). So, educational planners are called upon to be fluent with a variety of planning approaches, to know the strengths and weaknesses of each, and be able to assess their organization’s internal and external contexts to determine which to use for any given time or purpose.

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*Note: The references marked with asterisks are the ones the authors consider to be most directly related to the planning literature.*

# The Practice of Strategic Planning and Strategy Implementation in Public Universities of Ethiopia

Assefa Beyene Bassa

## ABSTRACT

*Recently Ethiopia has been engaged in a huge expansion of its higher education institutions. This was also accompanied by a series of institutional management reforms and quality assurance regulations. Accordingly, the organizational environment in the public universities of Ethiopia has been changing from time to time. In such a context, the key to better align these academic institutions with the needs of their rapidly changing internal and external environments is the design of appropriate strategic plans and effective implementation of their preferred strategies. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the practice of strategic planning and strategy implementation in public universities of Ethiopia. Data were collected through questionnaires from staff members (from both academic and administrative) and students; and through interviews from the management team members (Vice Presidents and Directors) of three selected public universities. The results of this study showed that in the sampled public universities: stakeholders' participation in the process of strategic planning was found to be low; less emphasis was given to critically assessing their ever changing external environment while planning; the practice of clearly communicating their preferred strategies and activities to both academic and administrative staff was found to be minimal and ineffective; there was also lack of adequate monitoring, follow up and feedback systems; moreover, major decisions were made without aligning them with the university's preferred areas of priority and major objectives as stipulated in the strategic plan document.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia, though one of the developing countries in the world, possesses a 1,700 year tradition of elite education linked to its Orthodox Church. However, secular higher education was initiated only in 1950 with the founding of the University College of Addis Ababa (World Bank, 2004). Yet, higher education is a key factor for socio-economic development agendas of countries in these days of globally interconnected knowledge economy. To this effect, recently Ethiopia has been engaged in a huge expansion of its higher education institutions by establishing large number of universities in a decade and half, increasing the intake capacity of the existing universities and diversifying academic programs. This was accompanied by a series of institutional management reforms and quality assurance regulations. Hence, the organizational environment in higher education institutions of Ethiopia is changing from time to time.

As a result, the leaders of these currently mushrooming public universities of Ethiopia are responsible for strategic visioning and planning and for effective implementation of their preferred strategies. In this ever-changing academic landscape, an effective strategic planning practice is highly essential to obtain new opportunities and resource requirements with future prospects by better aligning these universities with their internal and external environmental forces. The ultimate benefit of strategic planning practice for these universities is helping them identify clearly appropriate strategies in line with their missions as well as take their campuses where they needed to go (i.e. towards their preferred strategic direction).

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Ethiopia, the tertiary education gross enrolment ratio (GER) that was only 0.2% by the year 1970 had not shown any significant improvement after twenty five years in 1995 (which was 0.7%) and only 1.5% by the year 2003 (Teshome 2005; World Bank, 2004). According to the Federal Ministry of Education (MoE, 2010, p. 60), the GER for higher education increased from 3.6% in 1999 to 5.3 % in 2008/09. This means that the Ethiopian higher education has now come close to the African average in GER of 6% in 2000. In this connection, currently there are 31 Public Universities operating toward accomplishment of their missions, compared to the only 2 public universities (Addis Ababa and Haramaya) that existed 15 years ago and the annual intake of

undergraduates has increased from 9,000 in the academic year 1996/1997 to 94,000 in 2011/2012 (MoE, 2012).

This fast growth in students' enrolment trend in public universities of the country indicates that Ethiopia has been aggressively engaged in the expansion of higher education. This expansion policy of Ethiopia is similar to the expansionary policies of the last 50 years. Also known as massification fueled by social demand, open admission, free education and guaranteed employment, have led to higher education enrollments that, since the 1960s, have multiplied nine times in Africa and Latin America and four times in Asia (Trow, 2006). However, one of the most important implications of this growth is the overcrowding at the public universities with an associated perception of decrease in the quality of education (Altbach & Peterson, 1999)

Hence, this mere increase in student numbers alone in the Ethiopian public universities is not sufficient to meet the requirements of providing competent graduates for the social, political and economic development agendas of this nation. Besides expansion, the quality of existing universities is a necessary condition. As universities are accountable to their stakeholders and customers (the students, government and other employers and the public at large), those who manage these institutions need to guarantee their constituencies that the institutions they lead offer quality teaching, research and community services. Consequently, the leaders of public universities of Ethiopia must accept the challenges of developing quality in their operations. However, this expanding higher education systems are in need of resources: to employ growing populations of faculty and staff, to provide study grants or scholarships, to fund broader spectra of research areas, to build new teaching or research facilities, to preserve older capital investments, to stock libraries, or to furnish and upgrade complex infrastructures (Herbst, 2007, p. 3).

Above all, higher education leaders all over the world (including the leaders of public universities in Ethiopia) encounter an increasingly complex external environment where social, political, and market forces are reshaping the postsecondary landscape (Bess & Dee, 2008). It is also argued that the challenges of the higher education environment have become ever more complex as we seek to respond to the calls for reform coming from different directions, the need for change, the financial and budgetary difficulties we are all facing, the demand for accountability-all the issues that surround us, or perhaps bombard us, on a daily basis (Gillespie & Robertson, 2010).

To this connection, the key to successful institutional leadership, management and advancement is the design and implementation of a functional long range and strategic planning process (Wilkinson, et al., 2007, p. 11). The real significance of strategic plan is that it directs senior managers' attention away from day-to-day issues and forces a re-examination of the main purposes of the institution and its key relationships with its customers (Sallis, 2002, p. 119). Hence, the central reason for engaging in strategic planning is to better align the college or university with its environment (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 22).

Universities engaged in strategic planning as means to "make beneficial, strategic changes to adapt to the rapidly shifting environment" (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997). This follows that strategic planning process in universities may form the basis for a formal relationship with outside bodies, including government and other funding bodies or may be helpful in fostering closer relations with other external bodies, including local or regional government, the local community and other groups, and organizations and individuals with which the university interacts (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). Hence, competencies of strategic leadership style are very much required. Strategic leadership style is the combination of three different individual skills and abilities: visioning; focusing; and implementing (Neumann & Neumann, 1999).

A strategic plan within the university provides a link between academic planning (such as student numbers, courses, and research), financial planning (projected income and expenditure), and physical planning (buildings and infrastructure), and will also guide the overall allocation of funds (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). Therefore, strategic planning involves shifting the leaders and managers' position so that they consider the overall context and aspects of their institution rather

than one particular part, aspect, situation, or circumstance. For that reason, in academic institutions strategic planning is about identifying some common directions for the department, division, school or college based on needs of the external and internal stakeholders.

To attain the benefits of strategic planning, urgent strategic planning, strategic leadership competencies and practices are needed in these chaotic academic environments. However, the academic communities, here and there, are complaining that people in various leadership positions in most of the public universities in Ethiopia had been intensively engaged in trivial and routine administrative decisions instead of searching for more strategic issues and visionary-proactive leadership to better align the institutions with their internal and external forces that can positively or negatively affect their activities.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to align with the objectives of the study, attempts were made to seek reliable answers for the following research questions:

1. What is the practice of institutional strategic planning in public universities of Ethiopia?
2. How were the institutional strategies implemented in public universities of Ethiopia

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to gain an insight on the practice of strategic leadership in public universities in Ethiopia. In this connection, the overall objectives of this study were to specifically investigate the practices of strategic planning and strategy implementation of strategic planning in public universities of Ethiopia.

## A LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Strategic Planning in Universities*

Strategic planning is no longer simply the purview of business, and many campuses hope to duplicate the success that many businesses and not-for-profit organizations have had in developing and implementing their strategic plan (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 5). It is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision the future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future (Goodstein, 1993). Strategic plan, sometimes called a corporate or institutional development plan, details the measures which the institution intends to take to achieve its mission. It sets a medium-term timescale, usually over a three-year period. Its aim is to give the institution guidance and direction (Sallis, 2002, p. 124). Strategic planning is about what are the strategic choices that a university can make to help develop and sustain a competitive strategic advantage? (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

Strategic planning requires strategic thinking, which involves taking a broad set of facts and information into consideration as you strive to understand the present situation and circumstances, identify future trends and formulate future possibilities, decide on your organization's core values and value proposition, develop or firm up your organization's mission and vision, determine the means you will employ to attain your vision and accomplish your mission, and identify ways to mitigate or address challenges or obstacles likely to impede your progress or sub-optimize your overall success (Simerson, 2011; Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). Therefore, without a clear understanding of the institution's core beliefs and values, decision-making has no underpinning or consistency (Wilkinson, et al., 2007, p, 30).

Strategic planning enables the formulation of long-term priorities, and it enables institutional change to be tackled in a rational manner. Without a strategy an institution cannot be certain that it is best placed to exploit new opportunities as they develop (Sallis, 2002, p. 119). It is a means of establishing major directions for the university, college/school or department. Taken together, strategic planning and continuous quality improvement can dramatically improve the ability of the institution to meet the needs of its internal and external stakeholders (Paris, 2003). No planning process is going to be successful if that process is not imbedded in a thorough understanding of both the internal and external environments (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Hence, an effective

strategic planning in universities involves an internal focus on the campus and an external focus on the environment (Wilkinson, et al., 2007).

A strategic plan is only as successful as the mission, vision, goals and values it enshrines, as well as the accuracy of the environmental assessment, institutional capacity, resources needed and time frame for implementation (Hayward, Ncayiyana, & Johnson, 2003, p. 12). By establishing an environmental scanning process, institutions develop an early warning system to identify and monitor opportunities and threats that need to be anticipated as the campus strategically positions itself in the planning process (Hayward, Ncayiyana, & Johnson, 2003; Hinton, 2012; Wilkinson, et al., 2007;).

Strategic goals motivate people to achieve them, especially if they incorporate central aspects of the vision of the institution and are understood to be testable hypotheses, not rigid formulae (Morrill, 2007). Colleges and universities that align their mission with their educational policies and programs generally are more effective and efficient (Birnbaum 1991b; Bolman & Deal 1991).

The strategic leader recognizes (and emphasizes) the importance of strategy formulation and execution (Simerson, 2011). *Strategy formulation* refers to both the decision-making processes and outcomes that colleges and universities employ to align or fit their mission with their position in the marketplace (the environment), given the limited resources and capabilities of their internal systems (Lawrence & Lorsch, as cited in Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 202). As a result, the underlying base for choosing one type over another in the strategic choice process is dependent upon two major realities of the college or university: the resource base of the institution and the institution's prevailing philosophical academic position (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

Above all, successful strategic planning is inclusive, allowing every major stakeholder-management, teaching and research staff, support staff, students, the council, and other interested parties and stakeholders to participate (Hayward, Ncayiyana, & Johnson, 2003, p. 22). Shared governance is not one of the unique features of colleges and universities; it is also part of what makes campus operations effective. It is the lack of participation and the resulting distrust and power struggles that lead to the failure of the strategic planning process in many colleges and universities (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, pp. 177-78). Consequently, universities should encourage active participation of as many people as possible, including the faculty, administration, students and alumni, engaging them in the on-going dialogue and involving them in the strategic planning process in order to generate a feeling of ownership of the process and the outcomes throughout the university (Birnbaum, 1991a; Hax & Majluf, 1996).

In the first activities related to strategic planning, if top campus leaders commit to forming a full-campus leadership team and also commit to a full and open communications process, the resulting strategic plans will have a much greater chance of succeeding. In this connection, involving staff in major issues such as a strategic plan is one more way of gathering support for the successful implementation of that plan (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Moreover, according to these scholars, it is a real mistake not to include students (and perhaps alumni) in major campus decisions, since this is the very group that academic programs seek to benefit. Further, the thought that students really don't know what they want from their college or university is a notion that often proves to be false once students are invited to participate.

### *Strategy Implementation in Universities*

Strategy implementation refers to "actions taken by a college or university to put their positioning plans into action by changing their mission, changing their environment, or changing their resources, capabilities, and internal operations" (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 202). No organization anywhere in the world has ever added a single penny to its profits from making plans: the rewards are only realized when plans are implemented (Hussey, 1998). The implementation of strategy is arguably the most important stage in the process of strategic planning for one reason: Without successful implementation, an organization's strategy is really nothing more than a fantasy (Hambrick & Cannella, 1989). These scholars further argue that to

formulate strategies without some serious thoughts toward implementation seems a serious waste of the strategists' time. Implementing the plan brings commitment, focus and direction. Implementation is the key to making everything else functional (Wilkinson, et al., 2007). One of the caveats of successful implementation is to implement the strategic plan incrementally. By carefully selecting areas of the plan that will be easier and more straightforward to implement, leaders and planners can achieve success in the early stages of the implementation process (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

Strategy implementation requires strategic leadership skills in the organization. According to Reeves (2002), strategic leadership is the simultaneous acts of executing, evaluating, and reformulating strategies, and focusing organizational energy and resources on the most effective strategies. According to Harrison & John (1998), strategy implementation should be considered explicitly in the formulation stage so that any resulting strategy is in fact implementable when an organization has decided upon a particular strategic plan; planners and administrators are then charged with altering or creating an organizational structure to best carry out that plan. Once an organization has chosen the proper structure, the implementation process moves on to identify specific people and tasks to carry out the intentions of the planning process (Rowley & Sherman, 2001, p. 15).

A strategic plan is of limited value unless it is used in the budget exercise (Paris, 2003). In strategic planning practices most important thing to help achieve intended goals of an institution is linking and supporting the planned initiatives and activities with realistic long-range budget. Strategic planning must drive resource allocation *not vice versa* (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). The advantage for the institution using its strategic plan to allocate resources is that that everyone knows ahead of time which activities have priority and which will be receiving the resources in any given budget year. In addition, because the prioritization of these activities was an institution-wide negotiation, there is some buy-in and some patience with the process. Accordingly, the most common way of tying the entire strategic plan into the campus budget process is to prioritize campus needs, values, and programs (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Thus, without a clear tie between the most preferred strategies and institutional budget, implementing a strategic plan can become nearly impossible endeavour.

Monitoring and evaluation of strategy implementation processes in higher education institutions are so important to check whether the performance practices of planned initiatives and activities are being carried out as planned. Herbst (2007) opined that good planning practice of the past was unthinkable without monitoring or performance measurement, as unthinkable as driving an automobile without looking where the car is heading and without steering to keep the vehicle on course or out of trouble. Above all, as to Rowley and Sherman (2001), monitoring the implementation of the plan is an essential part of the planning process, and needs to be more than routine re-endorsement. The process also needs to allow for regular review and updating ensuring that the plan remains relevant.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was aimed at examining and describing the current practices pertaining to strategic planning and strategy implementation in the sampled public universities of Ethiopia. Therefore, it was a descriptive research in design. It was also carried out by applying a mixed methods research design especially that of the convergent (concurrent) mixed method design with the purpose of comparing the results from quantitative data with that of qualitative one. Here both types of data were collected simultaneously for triangulation and analyzed at the same time with the findings converging in the conclusions to answer an overarching research question (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010).

Recently, many researchers of management related problems have employed more mixed method approaches rather than just quantitative or qualitative research. The view is that a combination of research methods can serve mutual purposes because 'the relative strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods enable management and organisational researchers to address

important questions at different stages of a research inquiry’, thereby enhancing and enriching current knowledge by ‘filling in the gaps’ that studies adopting a singular approach are unable to do (Currell & Towler, 2003, p. 524).

There are also several viewpoints as to why qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined. For the purpose of this research the legitimate reasons of combining these two methods in a single study were to achieve triangulation-combining two or more sources of data to study the same phenomenon in order to gain a more complete understanding of it and to achieve complementary results by using the strengths of one method to enhance the other (Morgan, 1998).

### *Data Gathering Instruments*

Descriptive-survey researchers design and develop their own surveys to gather the perceptions of their sample participants on current educational issues (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006, p. 106). As this research was a descriptive survey research, the researcher self-developed questionnaires and interview guides to gather data from the sampled participants. For the sample size employed in this research was large, the researcher prepared close-ended questionnaires on the basis of the assessment levels. Hence, three categories of 5-point Likert scale questionnaires were prepared for respondents selected from management positions, from staff members (from both academic and administrative) and from graduating year students of the undergraduate programs in the sampled universities. Likert scales were given scores or assigned a weight to each scale, from 1 to 5. Five numerically coded boxes using a simple 5-point Likert scale for each assessment was provided to respondents.

To minimize the threats to validity, the questionnaires were prepared based on comprehensive knowledge in the research area and by consulting other professionals and experts with experience in the area of study to incorporate their feedback and ensure that the final instrument appropriate to measure what it was supposed to measure. Besides, for measuring internal consistency and its associated reliability of the instruments used in the study, Cronbach alpha was calculated and the results in each category of scales were higher than 0.70, indicating high reliability of the scale items in the instruments.

In addition to questionnaires, interviews were conducted by the researcher (himself) with the officials at the top level management positions in the sampled public universities in order to elicit an in-depth and pertinent data for the purpose of triangulating the results from quantitative data.

### *Data Sources*

In Ethiopia, currently, there are 31 public higher education institutions with full pledged university status accomplishing their mission of teaching, research and community services. Eight of these public universities are relatively old and organizationally well established. Three of them were promoted (as of 2007) from colleges to the level of university with adequately reasonable organizational development status and the rest of these public universities were newly established and started functioning from scratch as of 2007. In this study, therefore, those public universities which started their education and training programs from scratch as of 2007 G.C were excluded because they were considered as very immature to provide sufficient data required to meet the objectives of the study. Subsequently, the data sources for this study were three randomly selected universities from the stratas of those public universities which were believed to be relatively old and organizationally well established and from those of which were promoted from colleges to the level of university. Addis Ababa University, Jimma University and Dilla University were the sampled universities for this study.

Accordingly, the primary sources of data for this study were these sampled universities top level management team members, faculty/college/school deans and administrative units’ directors, department/program heads, academic staff members, non academic staff members and graduating year students.

## *Samples and Sampling Procedures*

A combination of appropriate sampling techniques was employed for the study to suit each group of respondents from management positions, from students, from academic and administrative staff. Accordingly, in this study samples from academic staffs were selected using stratified cluster sampling via categorizing them by their academic rank within their natural clusters of Colleges/Faculties/Schools. This sampling technique guarantees that the sample will include specific characteristics that the researcher wants included in the sample (Creswell, 2012, p. 144).

Besides, one-stage cluster sampling method was used to select officials from middle and lower level management positions (i.e. Deans, Directors, Division Heads) by categorizing the clusters based on their colleges/faculties/schools and listing all the clusters in the target population. Then clusters for this study were included by employing simple random sampling technique. On top of that, respondents from administrative staff were selected by using purposeful sampling technique, as it provided the researcher an opportunity to derive an in-depth understanding from information-rich cases on issues that were important to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002).

Furthermore, for the purpose of this study respondents from the graduating year students were selected by employing multistage cluster sampling technique, as the sampled universities had multiple dispersal located campuses based on their natural clustering in academic Colleges/Faculties/Schools. Cluster sampling technique is normally used to overcome problems associated with a geographically dispersed population where it is expensive in time and resources to construct a sampling frame for a large geographical area (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). Top level officials -Academic and Research Vice Presidents, and Directors of Quality Assurance in the sampled universities were also selected using purposeful sampling technique as they were believed by the researcher to be key informants for the interviews.

All in all, the dominant sampling technique employed in this study was cluster sampling (one of the probability sampling techniques) in its various forms (i.e. one stage, multi stage and stratified cluster sampling techniques) as each of them applies to select respondents from different groups and institutional levels.

## *Data Analysis*

In this study the qualitative data were used for triangulation purpose to see whether they support or refute results from statistical analysis of quantitative data. Thus, qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed based on concurrent mixed method approach by merging both quantitative and qualitative databases for example numbers and text (Creswell, 2012). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 15) computer software was used for analyzing the quantitative data part. For quantitative data the researcher used the Mean as a measure of central tendency (as the study comprised of a large sample size) to describe, and summarize the data in a simple and understandable manner.

When it comes to inferential statistics which are so important to draw inferences or make predictions about the population, the two most important considerations for choosing between the parametric and nonparametric families in survey analysis are *sample size and the type of scale used* in the survey questionnaire (Pallant, 2007). In this regards, the study employed large sample size but the scale type used to collect quantitative data was Five-point Likert-scale. However, since there is an assumption that a Likert scale database could not satisfy a normality distribution, and hence the non-parametric tests which are distribution free were applied as inferential statistical techniques to determine whether there was any difference between or among the comparison groups.

The non parametric statistical techniques used to test group differences in this study were the Mann-Whitney U test which is the non-parametric alternative of t-test and the Kruskal-Wallis H test which is the non-parametric alternative of ANOVA. The Mann-Whitney U test is used to

compare two independent samples when data are either interval scale but assumptions for *t*-test (normality) are not satisfied, or ordinal (ranked) scale. The non-parametric alternative of one-way ANOVA is Kruskal–Wallis and is used for ordinal data, or an interval-scale variable, which are not normally distributed (Creswell, 2012; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McCrum-Gardner, 2008; Pallant, 2007).

Besides this, interviews were analysed using typological analysis approach. Typological analysis approach is done by dividing all information collected through interviews into categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Thus, the interview data were disaggregated, labelled and summarized into categories and themes based on the attributes of successful institutional strategic planning and strategy implementation practices in universities (emanated from existing theories and empirical studies) and, accordingly, as posed by the researcher in the initial interview guiding questions. Hence, in this study the analysis of quantitative data was done first and followed by qualitative data (interviews) analysis in the form of texts and quotes to triangulate and/or corroborate the results and, finally to identify overall converged findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents for this study consisted of management team members (Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors, and Heads); staff members (from both academic and administrative staff members); and graduating year (final year) students from various areas of study. From a total of 124 questionnaires distributed to those who were working in management positions in the sampled universities 104 (83%) were completed and returned. Out of the 310 questionnaires distributed to staff (both academic and administrative) 241(77.7%) were completed and returned. Moreover, from the 720 questionnaires distributed to students 570 (79.2%) were returned. In general, from a total of 1,154 questionnaires distributed to all of the respondents categories, 915 (79.3%) were returned and these responses were used in the data analysis process.

### *Research Question 1.*

#### *What is the practice of institutional strategic planning in public universities of Ethiopia?*

For the data analysis purpose of this study, the values of the responses below 3 were considered as disagreements, the values of 3 were considered as neutral (indicating neither agree nor disagree) and values above 3 were considered as agreements. If we compute for the average value by summing up all the assigned values for the response alternatives under each of the items within the 5-point Likert scale questionnaires and dividing the result to the total of 5 alternatives provided we can get an average value of 3 (i.e.  $5+4+3+2+1=15/5=3$ ). Based on this assumption, for this study a mean value greater than 3 indicates agreement while a mean value less than 3 indicates disagreement. For quantitative data the mean responses of respondents were compared and judged against these values. Here, the analysis of quantitative data was done first and followed by qualitative data analysis in the form of texts and quotes to triangulate and/or corroborate the results of quantitative data and to finally draw the overall converged findings as presented in the following part.

*Table 1: Strategic planning Practice*

Variables Under Strategic Planning Process	AAU	JU	DU	Overall Mean
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Existence of Strategic Plan	3.36	3.85	2.96	<b>3.37</b>
Stakeholders participation in strategic planning	2.71	3.15	2.44	<b>2.75</b>
Clearly indicates the institution's strengths and weaknesses	3.06	3.49	2.61	<b>3.03</b>
Clearly describes the institution's opportunity from its external environment	2.96	3.47	2.63	<b>3</b>
Clearly describes threats to the institution from its external environment	3	3.29	2.67	<b>2.97</b>
Activities and programs are consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution	2.94	3.52	2.69	3.03
Activities and programs are clearly prioritized according to the vision and mission	2.89	3.54	2.65	3
Overall Mean on Strategic Planning Process	2.98	3.48	2.67	3.01

*Keys: AAU=Addis Ababa University; JU=Jimma University; DU=Dilla University; Question response scale: 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree.*

The results in Table 1 indicate that the mean ratings of respondents from JU were in agreement that their institution carried out its strategic planning by applying all the key dimensions required for the successful strategic planning process (Over all Mean= 3.48). At the same time the mean ratings of respondents from DU indicated that they were in disagreement

(Over all Mean=2.67), signifying that their institution carried out its strategic planning without adequately applying all the key dimensions and indicators required for successful strategic planning process. Even they were not in a position to agree about the very existence of strategic plan for their institution (M=2.96).

When it comes to AAU the respondents agreed that their institution have a strategic plan; the strategic plan has clearly indicated the institution's strengths and weaknesses; and it has clearly described threats to the institution from its external environment. However, they disagreed on the views that there was adequate stakeholders' participation in strategic planning; the strategic plan clearly described their institution's opportunity from its external environment; the activities and programs were consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution; and the activities and programs were clearly prioritized according to the vision and mission of their institution (see Table 1).

When we see the overall mean (in Table 1) for all the three sampled universities, the two main aspects necessary for successful strategic planning process such as stakeholders participation in strategic planning process (M=2.75), and clearly identifying the threats from its external environment in the strategic planning process (M=2.97) were in problem indicating that these public universities in Ethiopia were not sensitive to their institutions ever-changing external environments (see Table 1). Nevertheless the challenges arising both from internal and external environments of these days' universities require forward-looking, proactive management strategies by the leaders. The results in Table 1 have also indicated that the sampled public universities in Ethiopia did not take advantage of giving adequate chance for the participation of as many stakeholders as possible in their strategic planning process.

In order to check whether there is significant difference between the responses of the two independent groups (managers and non managers) about the practices related to strategic planning in their universities, the Mann-Whitney U Test was performed (as can be seen in Table 2 below).

*Table 2: The Strategic Planning Practice within the sampled universities as Perceived by Managers and Non Managers (Mann-Whitney U Test)*

Item	Respondents Category	N	MnR	Significance Test		
				Man Whitney U Test	Z	Sig.
Strategic Planning Practices	Non Managers	811	461.12	39639	-1	0.318
	Managers	104	433.64			

*Key: Significance Level:  $*P \leq 0.05$ ; MnR=Median Rank; Managers=Respondents from management positions; Non Managers=Respondents of Staff and Students.*

As can be seen in Table 2 the significance levels obtained are not less than or equal to 0.05, so the results are not significant. According to these results there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of both managers and non managers regarding practices related strategic planning in their institutions.

Moreover, to check whether there is significant difference across the three universities in their performance practices related to strategic planning, the Kruskal-Wallis Test was used.

*Table 3: Comparison of Strategic Planning Practices among the sampled Universities (Kruskal-Wallis H Test)*

Item	Universities	N	MR	Significance Test		
				X <sup>2</sup>	df	Sig.
Strategic Planning Practices among the three sampled universities	AAU	312	453.76	132.657	2	0
	JU	277	594.43			
	DU	326	346.13			

*Keys: Significance Level  $*P \leq 0.05$ ; AAU=Addis Ababa University; JU=Jimma University; DU=Dilla University; MR=Mean Rank;*

As can be seen in Table 3 the significance levels obtained are less than 0.05, so the results are significant. According to these results there is statistically significant difference across the three sampled public universities in their performance practices related to strategic planning, as perceived by the respondents. Based on this conclusion, to identify which university is in a better position, the researcher has inspected the mean rank for the three sampled universities in Table 3. Accordingly, an inspection of the mean ranks for these groups suggests that Jimma University is in a better position in terms of strategic planning practices (see Table 3).

To substantiate the findings from the preceding quantitative data analysis concerning issues related to strategic planning practices, interviews were carried out with the officials at the senior management levels across the sampled universities. In this connection, my interviewees from a senior leadership positions at Dilla University have witnessed the problems related to strategic planning practices in this university by stating as:

*Strategic planning in this university was not seen as a priority issue in comparison to other day to day managerial routines. According to these interviewees, for the last four years, officials in various top leadership positions had been talking about the preparation of strategic plan but they were not committed about it as they were for other routine activities and decisions. However, as to them, though the strategic planning process completed and ready for implementation, the vision and missions of the university were not adequately shared with all the concerned stakeholders. (ILM-DU).*

This result suggests that the issue of strategic plan in DU is the almost forgotten aspect of institutional management activities. This is contrary to other academic institutions that cope up effectively with and adapt to the rapidly changing interests of their internal and external environments. This result from the analysis of interview data also affirmed the results of quantitative data (as indicated in Table 1) regarding strategic planning practice in Dilla University.

Another interviewee from the top level leadership position in Addis Ababa University, concerning the practice and process of strategic planning in his university, explains that:

*Yes we have five years strategic plan with clearly stated vision, missions and values. In my view there was participation of concerned stakeholders in strategic planning process but I have been hearing here and there that academic community were complaining that the involvement major stakeholders was not adequate in the first place and was not continuous practice. He went on saying that I can assure you that we have good strategic plan consisted of all its major aspects (as a document) but it was not responsive to these days environmental dynamisms as it was not open to continuous revision. Another problem, according to this interviewee, was that in his university all of the decisions (both strategic and routine) which had been made were completely ignored what was identified as the preferred strategic direction and its associated objectives and activities in the strategic plan document of this university. Hence, according to him, strategic plan in Addis Ababa University was more of a formality (ILM-AAUI).*

From the results (of both quantitative and qualitative data) discussed above, it is recognizable that, in Addis Ababa University, the pressing problems related to its strategic planning practice were inadequacy of stakeholders participation and its inability to proactively assessing and predicting changes in its external environment.

Generally, the overall merged findings concerning strategic planning practice and process (from the above analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data) across the sampled public universities indicate that:

- The stakeholders (staff, students, employers, etc.) participation in strategic planning process and practices in these sampled public universities was found to be low and inadequate.
- There was also less emphasis given to assess their external environment in order to clearly identify the opportunities (to build on them) and threats (to reduce their negative impact). Hence, the prioritized strategic issues and objectives of these public universities strategic plans were highly affected by frequently changing interests and policy directions from the government and other external forces.

Contrary to these findings, the literature suggests that successful strategic planning is inclusive, allowing every major stakeholders-the management, teaching and research staff, support staff, students, the council, and other interested parties and stakeholders-an opportunity to participate (Hayward, Ncayiyana, & Johnson, 2003). Moreover, shared governance is not one of the unique features of colleges and universities; it is also part of what makes campus operations effective. It is the lack of participation and the resulting distrust and power struggles that lead to the failure of the strategic planning process in many colleges and universities (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

Scholars also suggest that the leaders' (in collaboration with the planning team and concerned stakeholders) readiness and commitment to continuously assess their institution's external environment and proactively accommodate changes occurring outside their institution is a crucial step to success in these days' ever changing academic landscape. Effective planning in universities involves an internal focus on the campus and an external focus on the environment. The challenges arising both from internal and external environments of the current universities require forward-looking, proactive management strategies by the leaders. It is difficult to envision a higher education institution committed to continuously improving its services without having a strategic plan with clearly identified opportunities (to build on them) and threats (to reduce their expected negative impacts) accompanied with the culture of continuous assessment from the external environment. The basic strengths of strategic planning are its abilities to help better align the organization with its environment (that set of internal and external forces that can positively or negatively affect the activities of an organization (Rowley & Sherman, 2001).

**Research Question 2.**

***How were the institutional strategies implemented in public universities of Ethiopia?***

Without successful implementation, an organization's preferred strategy is nothing more than a dream. Regarding the strategy implementation practices in sampled universities both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from respondents at management positions, staff members (both academic and administrative) and students. Table 4 indicates the results of quantitative data and for the data analysis purpose of this study the values of the responses below 3 were considered as disagreements, the values of 3 considered as neutral (indicating neither agree nor disagree) and values above 3 were considered as agreements. Hence, the mean responses of respondents were compared and judged against these values. Just in a similar way to the analysis procedures carried out above, in this part also the analysis of quantitative data was done first and followed by qualitative data analysis in the form of texts and quotes to triangulate and/or corroborate the results of quantitative data and to finally draw the overall converged findings as put in the following part.

*Table 4: Strategy Implementation Practices*

Variables Under Strategy Implementation	AAU	JU	DU	Overall Mean
	Mean	Mean	Mean	
Responsibility for the implementation of strategic plan is communicated to the staff	2.63	2.93	2.03	2.53
Mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of strategic plan are in place	2.41	3.09	2.21	2.57
Major decisions and activities are carried out as per the strategic plan	2.26	3.03	2.24	2.51
Resources allocated are adequate to implement the strategic plan	2.3	3.07	2.16	2.51
There is a practice of updating the strategic plan periodically	2.21	3.08	2.29	2.53
Overall Mean on Strategy Implementation Practices	2.36	3.04	2.19	2.5

*Question response scale: 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 2 = disagree; and 1 = strongly disagree*

*Keys: AAU=Addis Ababa University; JU=Jimma University; DU=Dilla University*

*Source: Primary Data*

The results in Table 4 show that as to the respondents from the staff and management positions of AAU and DU the responsibility for the implementation of strategic plan was not adequately communicated to the staff. According to them mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of strategic plan were also not in place in their institutions. They did not also agree that major decisions and activities were carried out as per the strategic plan in their institutions. For them resources allocated were also inadequate to implement all the activities as stipulated in their institutions strategic plan. Above all, in these two universities there was no practice of updating the strategic plan periodically (see Table 4). From this it can be deduced that strategy implementation processes in the sampled universities were affected by the lack of clear communication of the what, the where, and the how aspects of strategy implementation to the staff.

As can be seen in Table 4 JU was somehow better than the other sampled universities in strategy implementation aspects and practices. However, JU has also acute problems of communicating responsibilities for the implementation of strategic plan to the staff before beginning its implementation process (Mean=2.93), and more or less in carrying out major decisions and activities as per strategic plan.

To check whether there was significant difference between the responses of the two independent groups (managers and non managers) on practices related to strategy implementation, the Mann-Whitney U Test was performed (see Table 5).

*Table 5: Strategy Implementation Practices as Perceived by Managers and Non Managers (Mann-Whitney U Test)*

Items	Respondents Category	N	MnR	Significance Test		
				Man Whitney U Test	Z	Sig.
Strategy Implementation Practices	Non Managers	241	175.51	11927.5	-0.713	0.476
	Managers	104	167.19			

*Key: Significance Level: \*P ≤ 0.05; MnR=Median Rank; Managers=Respondents from management positions; Non Managers=Respondents from Staff (academic and administrative), excluding Student respondents.*

As can be seen in Table 5 the significance levels obtained are not less than or equal to 0.05, so the results are not significant. According to these results there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of both managers and non managers regarding practices related strategy implementation in their institutions. In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis Test was carried out to check whether there is significant difference across the three sampled universities in their performance practices related to strategy implementation as perceived by the respondents,.

Table 6: Strategy Implementation Practices among the sampled Universities as perceived by the respondents (Kruskal-Wallis H Test)

Items	Universities	N	MR	Significance Test		
				X <sup>2</sup>	df	Sig.
Strategy Implementation Practices	AAU	113	157.44	59.729	2	0
	JU	106	233.65			
	DU	126	135.93			

Keys: Significance Level \* $P \leq 0.05$ ; AAU=Addis Ababa University; JU=Jimma University; DU=Dilla University; MR=Mean Rank;

As can be seen in Table 6 the significance levels obtained are less than 0.05, so the results are significant. According to these results there is statistically significant difference across the three sampled public universities in their performance practices related to strategy implementation as perceived by the respondents. Based on this conclusion, to identify which university is in a better position, the researcher has inspected the mean rank for the three sampled universities in Table 6. Accordingly, an inspection of the mean ranks for these groups suggests that Jimma University is in a better position in terms of strategy implementation practices (see Table 6). To corroborate the findings from the preceding quantitative data analysis concerning issues related to strategy implementation practices, the data collected through interviews were analyzed as follows.

Accordingly, one of the interviewee from senior leadership position at AAU explained as follows:

*I can assure you that we had smart strategic plan as a document but when it comes to the implementation aspect of the strategic plan amazingly our university did not follow the strategy set out in it and all of the activities we had been doing were not in accordance to the objectives and preferred strategies set in the strategic plan. The strategic plan document was saying something and we have been doing some other thing. We haven't been strategic in carrying out our missions and objectives, but busy with responding to day to day routines. Our staff had been confused with frequently changed priority areas of the university on the one hand side and inadequacy of clearly communicating to them these ever changing priority areas and activities on the other hand side. So I could say that we had been totally engaged in crises management than proactive leadership towards our preferred strategic direction (ILM-AAU2).*

Another interviewee from the senior leadership position at DU said the following:

*We had been dwelling mostly in the issues which were not considered as strategic for our university. Even at the top management level we were debating in silly and routine issues. I doubt to say that we had shared vision. In general, I could say that we had been perturbed with giving priority to routine issues than strategic issues with a significant influence for betterment of our university (ILM-DU2).*

One interviewee from the senior management position at JU described the practices and problems of strategy implementation in their institution as follows:

*We had clearly stipulated priorities and strategies in our strategic plan document. We had been committed to successfully accomplish them. However, our major challenges have been accommodating the frequently changing external pressures and policy interests and directions of the government with our already prioritized strategic issues which required us to change somehow our already prioritized mission areas. He further went on saying that this situation has been affecting steady operation of our university (ILM-JU1).*

The interview results discussed above indicate that strategy implementation practices in these public universities had been troubled with problems that vary with the specific context of each of the universities, but still they all share many problems of strategy implementation in common. If we take AAU, it was highly engaged in crises management than focusing on the implementation of their preferred strategies and significant activities. In this institution strategies were identified for the sake of identification only. AAU is going to somewhere that cannot help it to win its competitive and strategic advantages in this globalized and highly competitive higher education environment. DU had no adequately shared vision and excellence areas let alone thinking about strategic positioning. JU had clearly shared vision with intensely identified priorities and strategies but its implementation practices were affected by volatility of the policy directions and pressures from higher education system management level which is external to the institution. This is the same as Taylor & Miroiu (2002) assertion that in higher education, commonly, much effort is deployed in the development of strategic plans; much less in ensuring effective implementation.

The overall findings regarding the strategy implementation practices across the sampled public universities summarized as follows:

- There was weak communication of responsibilities for the implementation of preferred strategies (as they were stipulated in their institutions strategic plans) to the staff (both academic and administrative).
- Lack of adequate monitoring, follow up and feedback mechanisms (by the management position holders and concerned others from top to lower levels in these sampled universities) for checking and supporting the strategy implementation practices of the staff (both academic and administrative);
- Leaders of these sampled universities frequently making major decisions without referring to and aligning them with the major objectives and preferred areas of priority (i.e. their preferred strategic directions) as indicated in their institutions strategic plans;
- Leaders of these universities did not adequately share their institution's vision and preferred excellence areas where they were heading to all concerned stakeholders (staff, students, employers, and the like).
- Fluctuations of preferred institutional strategic issues, priorities and strategies as a result of frequently changing policy directions at the nation's higher education system level and other external environment related pressures and resultant confusions by the universities communities.

Nevertheless, as scholars in the area of higher education management suggest that implementing the plan brings commitment, focus and direction. Implementation of strategic plan is the key to making everything else functional (Wilkinson, et al., 2007). To formulate strategies without some serious thoughts toward implementation seems a serious waste of the strategists' time (Hambrick & Cannella, 1989). No organization anywhere in the world has ever added a single penny to its profits from making plans: the rewards are only realized when plans are implemented (Hussey, 1998). The implementation of strategy is arguably the most important stage in the process of strategic planning for one reason: Without successful implementation, an organization's strategy is really nothing more than a fantasy. Hence, if the universities did not implement the strategies they identified what was the purpose of strategy formulation? It is simply a waste of time, talent and energy as well as other resources.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that, in the sampled public universities, stakeholders' participation in the process of strategic planning was found to be low. There was less emphasis given to critically assessing their ever changing external environment while planning. The practice of clearly communicating their preferred strategies and activities to both academic and administrative staff was found to be minimal and ineffective. There was also lack of adequate monitoring, follow up and feedback systems. Moreover, major decisions were made without aligning them to the institution's preferred priority areas and objectives as stipulated in the strategic plan document. Thus, it could be inferred that reaching to their preferred strategic direction in these public universities might be negatively affected and as a result, their prioritized missions' accomplishment and achieving strategic goals and objectives could not be reached. This could also lead to the conclusion that these sampled public universities might lack strategic leadership competencies to deploy the human talents and material resources of their institutions towards the effective implementation of their prioritized strategies in strategic planning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the significance of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- For the successful implementation of strategic plan, all the stakeholders who play significant roles in its implementation must be involved in the planning process. Successful strategic planning must include the major parties--management, teaching and research staff, support staff, students, the board, and other interested parties.
- The importance of strategic planning is its ability to better align the university with its environment (that set of internal and external forces that can positively or negatively affect the university's activities). Hence, while they are in their strategic planning process, the leaders of public universities of Ethiopia are expected to give high emphasis to an in-depth scanning and assessment of their institutions' ever-changing external environment to take advantage of opportunities and to reduce outside threats by making informed decisions.
- Since a university's vision is a directing force with a powerful inspirational and integration effect of all stakeholders to the preferred future of the institution, the leaders of public universities of Ethiopia need to have a clearly articulated and shared institutional vision with all concerned stakeholders especially the staff (both academic and administrative), students, the government and other employers.
- Without successful implementation, a good strategy is nothing more than a simple desire. Therefore, it is recommended that the leaders and management team of the public universities in Ethiopia need to:
  - Clearly communicate the responsibilities of the staff (both academic and administrative) toward the university's prioritized strategic issues and preferred strategies before starting full-fledged implementation process of the strategic plan,
  - Introduce adequate monitoring, follow up and evaluation mechanisms for the strategy implementation practices. The aim is to assess progress made towards the achievement of the strategic targets and also for updating and revision of plans based on the feedback,
  - Refer to the major objectives and priorities in their strategic plans when they are making major decisions.

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# Strategic Planning in Education in Turkey

Emine Babaoglan

## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the implementation of strategic planning within the K-12 schools of Turkey, beginning in 2010. In Turkey, the concept of strategic planning is often misunderstood and as a result, a large number of practical problems have arisen. Thus, strategic plans which were prepared and implemented in schools have not been realistic, functional or practical. Furthermore, educators throughout Turkey have become very skeptical of strategic planning. For successful implementation of the strategic planning process, it has been suggested that educators analyze and examine the values of the organization, the functional and situational plans, as well as the establishment of an effective communication network among school stakeholders. Furthermore, it is essential that the leadership/management of the school strategic planning engages the support of stakeholders' awareness in this process. In addition, it is suggested that the creation of a conceptual foundation for strategic planning, including awareness, stakeholder participation and promotion of the strategic planning process should occur. It is also suggested that schools collaborate with other schools and universities to share ideas and support for planning.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of globalization, the concept of strategic planning has become very important for organizational success in education. Mintzberg (1994) defines strategic planning as a "formalized procedure to produce articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decision" (p. 12). Strategic planning is critical in terms of minimizing the uncertainty of future and to provide sustainable competitive advantages (Demir & Yılmaz, 2010). It can assist an organization in helping to plan for the future (Güçlü, 2003). The importance of strategic planning stems from a focus on the concepts of mission, vision and identifying developmental directions for the organization. It helps the organization adapt to a changing environment, thinking systematically, and encouraging effective management and administrative efficiency. As a result, it is possible through strategic planning to evaluate opportunities and threats, determine the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, concentrate their attention on the vital issues and challenges faced by the organization (Gürer, 2006; Altan, Kerman, Aktel & Öztop, 2013).

## STRATEGIC PLANNING IS LAW

In Turkey, preparing strategic plan in public organizations became compulsory with Development Plans and "Public Financial Management and Control Law" in 2003. The purpose of this law was to require public administrations (Kamu Mali Yönetimi ve Kontrol Kanunu, 2003) to

- create the mission and vision within the framework of development plans, programs, the related laws and the basic principles which they adopt;
- determine strategic goals and measurable objectives;
- measure performance in accordance to the predetermined indicators and the monitor the process of preparing strategic plans in a cooperative manner.

In order for public administrations to provide the desired level and quality services, they must have their budgets and projects aligned to their strategic plan, which includes annual goals, objectives and performance indicators (Kamu Mali Yönetimi ve Kontrol Kanunu, 2003). Furthermore, the *Strategic Planning Workbook for Public and Non-profit Organizations*, developed by the secretariat of State Planning Organization, was put into effect in 2010, the same year that strategic planning was implemented in all elementary and secondary schools in Turkey (Altinkurt, 2010).

## RECENT STUDIES ON STRATEGIC PLANNING IN EDUCATION

During the past two decades, there has been much research and discussion regarding strategic planning for educational organizations in Turkey (Ağaoğlu, Şimşek, & Altinkurt, 2006; Altinkurt, 2010; Altinkurt & Bali, 2009; Arabacı, 2002, 2005; Arslan & Altınışık, 2013; Çalık, 2003; Erdem,

2006; Ereş, 2004; Güçlü, 2003; Işık & Aypay, 2004; Kabadayı, 1999; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2004, 2008; Memduhoğlu & Uçar, 2012; Özgan, Baş, & Sabancı, 2011; Türk, Yalçın & Ünsal, 2006).

Özgan, Baş, and Sabancı (2011) discussed in their study the objectives of strategic plans for schools to include physical needs, academic achievement and social events. They claimed that strategic plans should aim at improving academic success at school by helping students to prepare for university examinations. The authors concluded that the school's strategic plans should contain objectives and strategies in support of students' social, mental, and physical development.

Altinkurt (2010) stressed the importance of dissemination of strategic planning information. He highlighted in his research that staff of Provincial Directorate of National Education of Kütahya and school administrators generally had positive attitudes towards strategic planning. However, many stakeholders of strategic planning were holding negative attitudes such as distrust and resistance. He claimed that distrust and resistance to strategic planning implementations mainly stem from lack of information about the strategic planning process.

In their research, Arslan and Altınışık (2013) examined the strategic plans of the 32 primary schools in Van Province, using document analysis technique. The researchers found that the strategic plans of many schools were identical or similar. Schools were found copying from one another to complete the state required components of educational strategic planning.

Işık and Aypay (2004) examined three public school's problems associated with the strategic planning. They concluded that problems arising from strategic planning can be categorized as theoretical issue, human resource, time management, judicial problems and financial concerns. Strategic planning was seen as a legal requirement and managerial practice rather than planning application to solve the school problems. Staff in charge of strategic planning was not well prepared. The time allotted for the development of the strategic planning process was ineffectively utilized. Hierarchical structure and bureaucracy of the organization were barriers for strategic planning activities. Additionally, insufficient amount of dollars was budgeted for strategic planning activities. The authors identified theoretical issue as the most significant blockage to successful implementation of strategic plans and complimented the strategic planning team members for being enthusiastic and willing to participate.

Memduhoğlu and Uçar (2012) studied strategic planning of elementary and secondary schools in Turkey. They found that that institutional structure of schools was not supportive of effective strategic planning implementation. A lack of participation and understanding of the planning process by the school stakeholders resulted in ineffective plan implementation.

In addition, there was little support of strategic planning by teachers and school administrators. They did not believe strategic planning was necessary for schools the mission of which the current strategic planning applications did not serve. Also, divergence of teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding strategic planning existed. The authors also found that when preparing strategic plans, conditions of schools and their environments were often not taken into consideration. Schools' strengths and weaknesses were not examined critically; identified threats were ignored; sufficient time was not allocated to the plan development; and there was not enough specialist support for strategic planning (Memduhoğlu & Uçar, 2012).

The findings of the study also showed that elementary and secondary school principals did not have a good understanding of the aims and concepts of strategic planning. Professional training with increased financial support would certainly help the implementation of strategic plans. Administrators' professional training was also supported by Yaşamak Gülşen (2013) who concluded that practitioners must be well educated and supported during all phases of the planning process.

Çalık (2003) summarized the reasons of strategic planning failure as follows:

- Administrators were not knowledgeable of strategic planning.
- Administrators' confidence on strategic planning was weak.
- Voluntary participation to strategic planning process was insufficient.

- Top management and school environment did not adequately support strategic planning.
- Teachers were too busy to appropriately implement strategic planning.
- Adequate financial support and other forms of support were lacking.
- Supervisors did not provide guidance on strategic planning.
- Schools failed to establish cooperation with universities.
- Top management failed to make commitment to schools.
- Sufficient motivation and rewarding were lacking.
- Staff was losing interest in strategic planning because of lack of communication and work condition burnout.

Ayrancı (2013) studied school administrators' knowledge of strategic planning. He concluded that more than half of K-12 school administrators had sufficient knowledge of strategic planning, and acknowledged that strategic planning was necessary and helpful in determination of resources and needs. About half of the administrators received in-service training about strategic planning and about half of them received some kind of training. A similar study was conducted by Türk and Ünsal (2009) who recognized that about half of the senior managers of ministry of education had adequate knowledge about strategic planning.

Dökmeci (2010) concluded that, according to teachers and managers, the problems encountered in the strategic planning process were that the process was seen as drudgery, excessive paperwork, ignoring the current status of the school, lacking support of qualified instructors, and absence of participatory decision. However, the researcher found that when strategic planning was successful, it had a positive impact on schools, including improvements in teaching and learning, enhanced physical conditions of the school, better use of human, financial and technology resources, and more involvement of parents in the education of their children. In addition, the relationship between teachers and administrators could be enhanced as well.

## CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Strategic planning is compulsory in elementary and secondary schools in Turkey. However, such planning process is resisted in Turkey because it increases workload of teachers and administrators. Therefore, the support and enthusiasm for strategic planning is lacking. It can be concluded that strategic planning implementation in K-12 schools has not been effective thus far. Since strategic planning is not yet fully understood by school leaders and teachers, a large number of problems arise, leading to less than successful results (Ayrancı, 2013; Çalık, 2003; Dökmeci, 2010; Türk & Ünsal, 2009).

Implementation of the strategic planning process requires a thorough analysis of the values in the organization, functional and situational plans and establishment of an effective communication network among school stakeholders. Furthermore, education leaders need to make strategic planning a priority, and support all stakeholders in gaining an understanding of this process. In addition, the creation of the necessary structure for strategic planning, school environment awareness, promotion of successful work and volunteer participation to the strategic planning process should be encouraged. Collaboration among schools, universities and the government needs to be well established to ensure support for the strategic planning and implementation process for schools in Turkey (Çalık, 2003).

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# Strategic Planning in the Educational System of Poland: Complex Challenges of the Past, Present, and Future

Rafał Piwowski

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to provide insight into the strategic transition of preK-12 education in Poland in the Post World War II Period. Strategic planning was primarily focused on centralized state-control and was heavily predicated on Marxist-Leninist ideology in the three decades following World War II. However, since that time, there have been significant developments to decentralize education in Poland and empower more local control. This article provides the historical context of strategic planning during this transition.*

*When describing the Polish education system in general terms, it is necessary to state that, in the past, it was heavily state-controlled and entirely subjugated to Marxist-Leninist ideology. State control was reflected in a centrally designed syllabus, in the ministerial monopoly over textbook production, and in the laying down of strict requirements for teachers and other educational staff. In fact, teachers in the classroom had room for maneuver in their choice of methods, but hardly any in the content of their teaching.*

*An important feature refers to something that has, fortunately, not happened: the planned reform of the early 1970s intended to introduce the so-called "ten-year secondary school", which, in fact, would not have been secondary but rather a prolonged primary school. The reform would have been the belated implementation of the similar Soviet project of the 1950s. Although experience with the ten-year school in the Soviet Union was negative and the experiment was discontinued in 1973, it was, nevertheless, to be realized in Poland. Due to a shortage of teachers, financial means and a lack of progress in producing the required curricula, the reform remained on paper and was never really implemented (Piwowski, 1996b, p.16).*

*Another typical feature of the Polish system was the limited involvement of parents and the local community in school life. On the rare occasions it did occur it was limited to the problems of the material well-being of schools, and did not affect the syllabus and the contents of learning. For many years the development of general secondary schools was curbed, the learning of foreign languages was reduced and young people of the working class were led into a cultural cul-de-sac, namely, basic vocational schools. There was wide-scale destruction of the school network in the country; the educational (Communist Party) authorities decided, at the end of the first half of the 1970s, on a concentration of the rural school network because there were too many small schools. There were good reasons for the decision, but it was carried out without any preparation and in a mechanical way. Many schools that had existed for many years, some of them built by the farmers, peasants themselves, simply disappeared. Many teachers from these closed-down small schools left the teaching profession because they had lost their special allowances for work at a small school.*

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THE HISTORIC CONTEXT IN POLAND

Education has been classified as an "open-social system" that is continuously impacted by its mega, macro, and micro environment in such a manner that as the environmental context or the specific social, economic, or political aspects of the society change significantly so does the society's educational philosophy, policies, and practices (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Norton, 2005; Polka, 1999; Polka, 2014). Accordingly, strategic planning for schooling within an open-social system is a multi-variable uncertain experience based on 'best projections' of educational leaders at a specific time, but, because everything that contributes to an open-social system as well as the entire complex of systems within the society are inter-dependent, everything depends on everything else (Norton, 2005; Polka, 2014). Subsequently, any significant changes in the social, economic, or political systems of a country have major impact on the educational system including: educational visions, goals, objectives, instructional materials, teaching strategies, and assessment systems whether intended and carefully planned, or not (Hatch, 2013; Hoy & Miskel,

2005; Kaufman, Herman & Waters, 2002; Norton, 2005; Polka & Guy 2001; Polka & Pucher, 1994).

The history of education in Poland reflects this general symbiotic interrelationship between schools and societies. The educational institution in Poland has been evolving in structure and substance as the nation evolved, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. The Polish education system from the end of World War II to the pre-dawn of the Twenty-first Century was, generally, heavily state-controlled and entirely subjugated to Marxist-Leninist ideology. The economic and political philosophy of the state was reflected in the educational orientation of the schools as state control was reflected in a centrally designed standardized syllabus, in the ministerial monopoly over textbook production, and in the promulgation of strict requirements and expectations for teachers and other educational staff. In fact, teachers in the classroom had some flexibility in their respective classrooms in terms of the instructional methods they would employ to teach the government determined curriculum, but had hardly any choice in the content of their teaching. Convergence to the state controlled educational system was not only expected but it was reinforced via legislative fiat and inspector supervision. Times change and so do individual as well as societal values and perceptions of the past, the present, and the future. Consequently, a strategic planning change in education that may have been considered appropriate and positive at one time may be considered inappropriate and negative at another time.

A good example of this perception regarding planned change in Poland was a major educational reform initiative of the early 1970s. A countrywide planned reform of primary and secondary schools titled, "The ten-year secondary school" that was not really intended to improve secondary education in Poland but rather was designed to prolong primary school education. This educational reform plan was designed in a similar fashion to a Soviet project of the 1950s. Although experience with the ten-year school in the Soviet Union was negative and the experiment was discontinued in 1973, it was, nevertheless, planned for implementation in Poland. However due to a shortage of teachers, financial support and a lack of progress in producing the required curricula, the reform remained on paper and was never really implemented much to the chagrin of the government but much to the delight of most educators (Piwowski, 1996b, p.16).

Another typical feature of the Post-World War II Polish educational system was the limited involvement of parents and the local community in school life. However, on the rare occasions when it did occur it was limited to problems related to the physical well-being of schools, and did not affect the syllabus and the contents of learning. For many years the development of general secondary schools was curbed, the learning of foreign languages was reduced and young people of the working class were led into a cultural cul-de-sac, namely, basic vocational schools. There was wide-scale destruction of the rural school network in the country as the Communist Party education authorities decided, at the end of the first half of the 1970s, to concentrate on the rural school network and consolidate schools because there were too many small rural schools. There were good reasons for the decisions to consolidate schools, but it was carried out by the central government without any preparation and in a methodical way without regard to the needs of the communities and students impacted. Many schools that had existed for many years, some of them built by the peasants themselves, simply disappeared. Many teachers from these closed-down small schools left the teaching profession because they had lost their special allowances for working at a small school. Some researchers, educational experts as well as economists, consider that the expenditure on education in the 1970s was reduced to the level of a non-developed, poor country, and at any rate far below the level of so-called "educational death" level.

The same constraining model of centralized educational planning control prevailed in the 1980s. The first parliamentary bill during this martial law period was "Teachers: Charter of Rights" in the beginning of 1982. It granted many unexpected benefits to teachers including the following key provisions: a shorter working week and less working hours, early retirement, and the right to become a certified teacher after two years of work in the school (Kwiecinski, 1995 p. 82, 240). As a result, in the second half of the 1980s, schools employed more than 100,000 teachers with no proper educational qualifications (about 25% of total). And, to add to the negative impact of this education policy, even those teachers who were not performing well in

their schools could not later be dismissed easily because they had become "certified teachers" and were entitled to stringent job security protections. In addition these inopportune social privileges given to teachers via this government policy in order to secure their loyalty to the martial law authorities cannot be revoked today (Piwowarski, 1996b, p.10). However, a major problem, a serious negative legacy of the policies of the martial law period in Poland, is the way most teachers thought about teaching and learning. Most educators were not able to and/or not willing to use the freedom of thought and action that they had been given by government policies. Unfortunately, the new "Proletarian" teachers did not automatically become creative individuals involved in the democratic transformation of society (Piwowarski, 1996a, p.60). Subsequently, the country as a whole, and, specifically, the individuals educated in it, did not experience a learning renaissance in the fifty years after World War II as was the case in other European countries. Therefore, in Poland, both the best laid plans and the worst laid plans did not come to fruition.

Accordingly, the following statistics about Polish secondary schools in the 1980s reveal the lack of educational successes associated with that centralized approach to strategic planning for education:

- Only about 40%-45% of primary school-graduates completed full secondary education and, thus, became eligible for university studies (In 2015 that figure is about 83%);
- An extensive system of three-year basic vocational schools existed throughout the country that did not provide full secondary education certificates and offered very narrow vocational training without solid theoretical framework. In about 1970, 50% of the primary school completers attended this type of school (In 2015 that figure is about 14%).

Plans were developed to revise the system and accommodate the ever-changing needs of society and contemporary students. The Polish educational system, like all other educational open-social systems, continued to evolve influenced by the changes in the mega, macro, and micro environments of the time. The present constitutional and legal foundations for education were strongly influenced by the Solidarity period (1980-81), by the "round table" negotiations with communists in spring 1989, and finally were given shape in the Polish Educational Act of 1991. That act and later amendments to it comprehensively describe the whole educational reality in Poland until recently. In line with the Polish Educational Act of 1991, schools can be of two types: public (state) schools, which offer free education within the framework of the defined curriculum, and non-public schools. The latter schools can be social, civic, religious affiliated, or private schools, etc. Non-public schools appeared for the first time in the Polish education system in September 1989. The schools were then called "social" or "civic" because of the great amount of work that was invested in them by people from local social groups; mostly parents and teachers. These schools have their own curricula that are approved by the Minister of Education. They are financed from fees paid by parents. Funds can also come from private enterprises and foundations. Since February 1990, according to education policy, non-public schools receive a subsidy calculated according to the number of pupils and 50% of the average cost of pupils in state schools. "Private" schools have also opened in Poland functioning as profit-making enterprises. Unlike the "social" or "civic" schools, these private schools are clearly intended for the children of wealthier families.

After World War II, demographic changes and developments in Poland strongly influenced its education system. There were two great baby boom peaks: 1955 and 1983. At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, it was particularly difficult for primary schools, as they had to cater for the largest groups of children in some time due to the latest "baby boom". Similarly, the last years of the twentieth century were especially difficult for secondary schools since they had to educate the greatest numbers of 15-year-olds. Together with the economic recession, these strongly fluctuating demographic developments made it difficult for the Polish education system to engage in meaningful reforms. Thus, the current decline in the school-aged population is more conducive to facilitating substantive educational reforms because of the decline in pupil numbers. Consequently, educational planners focused less on the physical needs for schools and classrooms and more on philosophical and pedagogical issues.

## CHANGES WITHIN POLISH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Historically in Poland as in other countries, educational planning, even if the plans are not fully implemented, commences from the point of view of educational policies that are prominently articulated and enforced. Educational planning, based on the specific focus of the lens that is used at the time, is a necessary process for raising awareness of the changes that should be made in educational organizations and the learning needs that should be met in order for the educational institution and the society to survive and thrive (Hatch, 2013; Kaufman, Herman & Waters, 2002; Norton, 2005; Polka, 1999; Polka, 2014; Polka & Guy 2001; Polka & Pucher, 1994). It should also be assumed that strategic planners are guided by financial possibilities, human resources available, sometimes political considerations - which make future changes possible as they contemplate and develop educational plans at the national level.

It is imperative, thus, to analyse of the changes in the Polish education system in the recent past, as an important starting point for thinking about the future. The main change, that was introduced as early as 1989, which is historically identified as the beginning of the end of the socialist system in Poland, was called the "putting straight" period wherein the contents of such subjects as history, civics, Polish language, and philosophy were updated to reflect a less soviet revisionist perspective and a more factual Polish orientation. In the new textbooks the content was introduced which was, previously, known only unofficially to some scholars but not in all academic learning circles. In addition, the management and funding of educational institutions changed quite radically, although both remained with the same or only differently named authorities and institutions. The essence of these changes consisted in the decentralization of the system. Accordingly, the transfer of a number of decisions to the lowest levels of government such as: local civil government, school principals, and even teachers. This devolution was a major policy change in Polish government and education and was a harbinger of less centralization and control and more local decision-making.

Currently, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the oversight and administration of the education system and coordinates national educational policy with the education authorities of the 16 voivodships (regions) of the country. The Minister has the power to adopt regulations and create a legal framework for the functioning of all public and non-public educational institutions. More detailed powers of the Minister now include:

- establishing requirements and procedures for admission to schools.
- designing core curricula for all subjects and types of schools which are freely implemented by teachers, using freely chosen textbooks and teaching aids.
- establishing the rules for assessing and promoting pupils
- conducting nationally uniform and "externally" assessed tests, examinations,
- scheduling the school year, the dates of school holidays, free days related to public/national holidays (Polish EURIDICE unit, 2012 p. 13)

Therefore, in comparison with the past political era, the Minister of Education in Poland still plays an important role in terms of initiating and coordinating national educational policy, but he/she is under much greater social control and has significantly smaller financial resources at his/her disposal.

At the regional level (voivodship) the supervision over the education system is exercised by an education superintendent. He/she is responsible for implementing the policy of the Minister of Education. Their supervisory responsibility is primarily pedagogical in nature; additionally, the superintendent is responsible for teacher training institutions and the education of teachers, excluding higher education. Before 1989 the powers of the superintendent were much greater and more comprehensive so much so that numerous decisions at lower levels of educational administration had to gain his/her approval.

Therefore, many centralized powers, including, primarily that of managing the financial resources coming from public funds, and allocations of them in the budget for educational institutions, were transferred to the lower autonomous local levels of government. In fact, both the district (powiat) and, above all, local authorities at the level of commune (gmina), and local municipality, determine the current and planned educational policy. District authorities are responsible for administering upper secondary schools (post-compulsory), and the communes run kindergartens, primary, and lower secondary schools. In simple terms, the school funding mechanism is based on the updated yearly so-called base amount allocated for an average student. The actual amount distributed to district authorities and communes depends on the type of school

and community; for example, schools in rural areas, typically with fewer students, and thus, with higher unit costs - get additional funds as supplements to address their specific needs. Also, now at the school level, the head of school is the key and often the final decision-maker. The head of the school is responsible for matters relating to teaching, personnel policy, and contact with the local community.

### *Child Care and Pre-School Education*

Child-care and preschool education, regarded as the first level of the system of education, includes children aged 3-5/6 years. Compared to most European countries, Poland has one of the lowest participation rates at this level of child care and education. By 1989, despite numerous propaganda declarations identified that the threshold of 50% (total number of children in this age group) has never been exceeded. The decreasing number of children and the takeover and subsequent closing by local governments of pre-school institutions, kindergarten, and so-called pre-school classes in primary schools, meant that in the first half of the 1990s the participation rate in this child care sites decreased to 43 % (GUS, 2007). However, at the end of the twentieth century and in the first decade of the twenty first century the percentage of children attending kindergartens was growing and currently exceeds 71% for all children 3-6 years of age but is higher 84% in urban areas, and lower 54% in rural areas (GUS, 2013). But, those percentages are also the result of significant differences in the pre-school participation rate in individual years as most recently all 6-year-olds attend a pre-school education institution. However, among younger children, the attendance rate considerably drops.

During the past 25 years a few thousand kindergartens were closed in Poland and when, in the last few years, the number of children started to increase again, an acute deficit of places for kindergartens was felt in several large cities. This was sometimes followed by embarrassing selection procedures for children entitled to use these facilities. The problem of child care and pre-school education should not be considered exclusively from the perspective of the participation rates because the type of institution the children attend is also very important. In general, kindergartens that provide care from early morning until late afternoon are considered better since they are more comprehensive learning environments. Pre-school classes have shorter hours, sometimes have a feel of a school rather than kindergarten, and are not always completely isolated from the effect of noise, aggression, and "bad example" from the older children. Most children in rural areas attend a pre-school class in a primary school if they do attend some pre-school education institution at all. In cities, the vast majority of children attend kindergartens.

But, full access to child-care and pre-school education in Poland, especially in rural areas, is one of the most urgent problems that needs to be solved by the authorities at all levels of school management. In January, 2008, the Minister of Education issued regulations establishing two new forms of preschool education, to meet these needs. The forms are: pre-primary education groups and pre-primary points where classes can be held in less numerous groups of children. In both of these new forms the classes are even shorter than the pre-school classes in schools and, also, in the pre-primary education groups students are not expected to attend daily.

### *Primary and Lower Secondary Schools*

The school year 1998-1999 was the last in which the traditional eight-year primary school was functioning. The following year, a six-year primary school and a three-year lower secondary school organization started operation. Also, in the 1999-2000 school year, the highest number of primary schools were closed or reorganized into lower secondary schools. However, some Polish education experts point out that the network structure of lower secondary schools is not favourable from the educational and organizational point of view, due to its considerable fragmentation. Secondary schools numbering up to 160 students may be considered too small because they can have, at best, only two parallel classes. This imposes limits on, for example, the choice of foreign languages and organizing extra-curricular activities and this small school size is not conducive to healthy competition and increases the cost of education per student.

But, there are grounds for concluding that the introduction of lower secondary schools has contributed to raising the level of general education of 15-year-olds in Poland. The results of the (PISA) study from 2000 to 2012 have shown a significant increase in the achievements of Polish students primarily in reading comprehension with results in mathematics close to the OECD

average. Currently, all 15-year-olds attend lower secondary schools; previously some of the students, especially the weakest ones, attended vocational schools. The PISA study shows that Poland belongs to a small group of countries that have improved their score since 2003 (OECD (2000-2012), PISA Results).

Two main achievements of lower secondary schools, at least in the area of reading and reasoning, are: firstly, the inclusion of a substantial part of the weakest students in a unified system of general education with much better results than in the former, eight-year primary school and secondly, extending the teaching of more advanced skills of working with text materials via reading and reasoning to the entire population of students. The first of the aforementioned achievements has resulted in the reduction of the group of students poorly prepared for further study and the second has improved the academic achievement of the top group of students. Therefore, the lower secondary schools have undoubtedly contributed to the spread of reading comprehension and reasoning skills, which, subsequently, resulted in raising the general level of education of their respective students, and the students of vocational schools have demonstrated slightly better results than their colleagues who had previously graduated from the eight-year primary school.

### *Upper Secondary Schools*

After graduating from lower secondary school, students choose one of the two main education pathways: (1) general secondary schools, whose main objective is preparation for the continuation of studies in higher education institutions which requires successful achievement on the national Matura examination or (2) vocational education which has been greatly impacted due to the unfinished reform syndrome of recent years. But, there are still systemic problems that need to be addressed since in Poland, on one hand, it is declared with pride that over 86% of young people aged 16-18 are educated in schools that end with the Matura exam; however, on the other hand, due to low interest of young people in vocational education, some sectors of the economy suffer labor shortages that is further exacerbated by the emigration of mostly young people.

### *Secondary schools*

Among secondary schools, three year general secondary schools are most popular with young people. Until 1989, the access to the 4-year general secondary schools was rationed in such a way that they could be attended by no more than 20-22% of a given age group of young people (15 - 18 years of age). But, with the transformation of the political system came a rapid development of general secondary schools as the following data illustrates:

- Prior to 1989 there were about 900 general secondary schools.
- 1990 there were about 1,100 general secondary schools.
- 1992 there were about 1,500 general secondary schools.
- 2007 there were about 2,500 general secondary schools (GUS 2007, GUS 2013a).

Today, the number of general secondary schools is slightly lower than in 2007 which is a result of not only the population demographics but also of a slow, but growing interest in vocational schools based on employment demands the labour market.

For a number of years now these general secondary schools have been the ones upon whose completion one had the best chance of continuing education in higher education institutions. However, the mere completion of general secondary school and getting into college/university, especially paid private, but also public, because of the system of extramural studies is not as difficult as in the past. Due to the small number of potential students - many schools, to enrol adequate numbers of young people, significantly lowered the threshold requirements. Currently, in many cases, the general secondary school exit certificate is the only one requirement for admission to higher education studies.

### *Vocational education*

Schools in Poland currently offering vocational training programmes can be divided into two groups:

- 1) Secondary schools that are either:
  - a) Two or three year basic vocational schools that culminate without taking the Matura examination,

- b) Four year technical secondary schools that preparing students for the positions such as specialized technicians. Students in these schools can take the Matura examination,
- 2) Post-secondary schools, designed primarily for graduates of general secondary schools who want to get vocational qualifications and enter the workforce.

Historically, the students who attended the various types of vocational schools were mostly primary school graduates (c. 80%). Currently, the percentage of students who attend vocational schools has dropped to about 45% of the graduates of lower secondary schools. In recent years, the fastest growing and fastest commercializing sector of vocational education are post-secondary schools. They are designed primarily for graduates of general secondary schools wishing to obtain a vocational qualification at the level of technician or skilled worker. The number of these schools increased in the last 10-20 years several times and most of them are non-public schools. However, a renewed interest in vocational schools has emerged. This interest is associated with trends in the labour market where trained technicians and graduates of vocational schools or post-secondary schools with a vocational qualification have a better chance of getting a job than in previous years including jobs working abroad.

### *Non-Public Schools*

The non-public education services market is now relatively stable. After the fast pace of growth in the nineties, it reached a higher "saturation" level. For instance, the growth of the number of non-public kindergartens and post-secondary schools, and, to a lesser degree, of primary and secondary schools, is slower than it was in the 1990s and the number of general secondary schools decreased. Non-public educational schools and institutions are generally smaller and attended by, on average, only a few percent of the total number of students who are eligible to attend. But, the importance for the whole educational system of this kind of educational option is meaningful since there is definite interest in these non-public schools. And, the government's attitude towards, and state funding of, non-public education is a barometer of educational policy towards non-public education. It seems that a good benchmark of this educational segment is the quality of education provided comparable to that of the public schools and the eventual careers of the non-public school graduates. The results on national tests and external examinations that are given at the completion conducted of consecutive stages of education show that non-public school graduates obtain results much better than graduates of public schools. Note, however, that it is not only the merit of the schools, but also the result of the selection of students as well as the cultural and socio-economic status of their family that factors into student achievement success.

It can be assumed that, similarly to other countries, non-public education in Poland has become a permanent part of the national education system. One of the advantages of non-public schools, especially private schools, is their autonomy. Some experts point out that if public schools succeed in adopting some of the characteristics of private schools, the attractiveness of non-public schools may significantly decrease and, consequently, the loss of a part of the educational market may ensue (Finn, Ravitch, 1996). If, however, the competition between the two segments benefits state schools, which are the foundation of any educational system, it would be, from the point of view of the majority of citizens and the state, favourable change.

### *Higher Education*

Higher education, especially non-public, has been developing since the early nineties at an unprecedented pace as the following data points illustrate:

- In the academic year 1990/91, the second year of political transformation, 112 higher education schools were attended by about 404,000 students.
- In 2007/2008, 448 higher education schools of all types were attended by 1,940,000 students or over four times more than in 1990.
- The consequence of the change is the fact that Poland has now one of the highest "academic" enrolment rates in the world.
- The enrolment rate has, in the past 10-20 years, increased almost fourfold (from 12% to 44-47%) (GUS, 2013b).

More than 70% of the higher education institutions in Poland are non-public, but it is in the public schools where more than two thirds of all students are enrolled. Non-public schools are, thus, much smaller and much more often located in relatively small cities/towns with perhaps up to twenty thousand residents, and, in extreme cases, with only a few thousand inhabitants. Most of the non-public higher education institutions offer only undergraduate economics courses. However, this dynamic growth and development of higher education institutions is considered to be taking place, to some extent, at the expense of the quality of education. The rate of growth of the number of academic staff and of the improvement of the material base of higher education is much slower than the increase in the number of students in the same period.

In higher education, the deficiencies of earlier levels of education can be clearly seen. This phenomena applies primarily to mathematics education whose position weakened in lower and upper secondary schools as a result of some of the reform agenda changes. Poorer readiness of secondary-school graduates to take college/university courses in mathematics, natural sciences, and engineering was partly due to the withdrawal or lowering of the requirements in mathematics as a compulsory subject in Matura examination. There was always a political subtext to the decisions regarding the inclusion of mathematics on the Matura examination for the first time in 1983, and again in 2003 there was a downgrading of mathematics content, but mathematics was restored as a compulsory Matura subject in 2010. The effects of these manipulations were clear in that the graduates of secondary schools ending in Matura examination all too rarely chose the aforementioned courses since for many graduates the main criterion for the selection of the course of study was the absence of mathematics. Thus, the percentage of students in mathematics/natural sciences and engineering courses is too low when one takes into account the high practical value of these studies for the knowledge-based economy. The deficit of such specialists is exacerbated by the fact that until recently, more than 25% of the students in these courses dropped out after the first year.

## PROJECTIONS AND PLANS

Currently, compulsory education in Poland comprises primary and lower secondary education with a combined total of nine years of required schooling, but it is legally extended until the age of 18, which means that the vast majority of young people continue learning after they leave lower secondary school. In the future schools ending in Matura examination will probably be obligatory, thus, the period of compulsory education will last more than ten years. The UNDP forecasts, which estimate the average number of years a child born today will learn in the future are worth looking at. For the countries at the top of the ranking list such as Australia, and New Zealand, the estimates indicate around 20 years, but, for Poland the estimate is 15 years (UNDP, 2013, p.144). Of course, it is difficult to predict the future of schooling and how long the process of education will last in the perspective of 10-20 years from now, and, even more difficult, in the perspective of several decades. It is highly probable, however, that alongside institutionalized kindergartens and schools in Poland the following will occur:

- pre-school education will cover 3 years (children aged 2-5) at the level of about 85% of the population but, if this level of education is compulsory - the percentage will be even higher.
- compulsory school education will certainly start earlier than at present, and will include more than ten grades.

It can be assumed that in the future a young person will attend all kinds of pre-school institutions and schools on average, for about 21 - 22 years, excluding any subsequent professional training, work-related courses. This period will be shorter for students who will start work relatively early, in occupations which do not require particularly high qualifications, and longer, for students doing a course of study similar to the current doctoral or academic postgraduate studies. Future models of school will be affected not only by the concepts relating to the period of education, number of years, but also by detailed guidelines concerning, for example: the number of children in the class and school. Such concepts can be elaborated based on current experiences, however, one thing is certain, the less numerous the classes, groups, schools, the higher the cost, but, at the same time, generally, the higher the quality of education and care. As usual, these considerations concern public education, largely in cities as there are slightly different rules that will govern or educational institutions and schools in sparsely populated rural areas.

## *The Dominant Models of General Education in The Future*

The earlier published proposals presented below (Piwowarski, 2008), are related to the trends which are likely to intensify in the future, and, to some extent, may already be in existence in various places in the world and in Poland. More often, they will also contain elements of other models that rarely exist in "pure" form and the nomenclature for them will be decided because of their dominant feature or function:

### *City model*

It will be probably be the most common model, and the higher the level of education, the greater its dominance. A distinction can be made between the following two basic variants:

- local city model typical for larger cities; due to the high density of urban development it has a relatively small range, but covers more students.
- collective city model, typical for rather smaller cities or the suburbs of larger cities; often "collecting" students from suburban residential areas, part of which is distinctly rural in character. These schools are more diverse with respect to the number of students.

### *Rural model*

The occurrence of rural education models will depend not only on the pace of urbanization of the country and rural depopulation, but, also, on the re-ruralization that is currently being experienced in many countries including Poland. This re-ruralization, unrelated to agriculture, which is an increasingly common phenomenon among people of higher socio-economic status and includes:

- *local rural model* that is uncommon and limited mostly to the largest rural localities with sufficient number of students to organize school. But, it does not preclude the admission of students from other localities.
- *local-collective rural model* that consists of a large group of students from its locality and a significant number of pupils transported from other localities. This is a typical model for the larger schools located in rural areas.
- *collective rural model* based almost exclusively on transported students often from many localities. These schools are diverse in terms of the number of students.
- *"teachers" rural model* that is based largely on the teachers commuting to small schools and education points.

### *Electronic technologies model (E-learning)*

This model is likely to have the widest application in sparsely populated areas because of the limited access to general education schools. The online role of this model of education will increase in lifelong learning, adult education, and, primarily, part-time studies for working individuals interested in furthering their educational opportunities. It is difficult to predict what new revolutionary information technologies may arise in the future that will further enhance the application of technology to all levels and forms of learning. Even more powerful multimedia computers will be available, there will be even more opportunities to use the synthesis of visual, auditory, and tactile technology in teaching, but, there will be an accompanying disparity between the vast knowledge concerning these technologies and the use of these learning tools based on wealth level of the students.

It should be emphasized that these new technologies should not lead to closing of the school as an institution, but, the problem is, and will be the optimal use of e-learning on the part of educational institutions. It seems that the educational system should not be dehumanized that is specifically stripped of the student - teacher relationships, and/or, to an extent student-student relationships as well as teacher-parent contacts. In Poland, as well as elsewhere in our world, the peer-learning environment, the social composition of classes, and the culture of schools generally have a highly positive impact on educational achievement. So, if there is no, "higher necessity" understood for the absence of a traditional type school, the local and state school authorities shouldn't deprive students of mutual contacts and "high-touch" learning, that for many of them, in addition to the cognitive academic benefits - is the greatest pleasure on the difficult path of education. However, E-learning as well as e-play in pre-schools will be used at each level of

education and in all its models. But, it's important that educational planners maintain an appropriate "high-touch" and "high-tech" balance for schooling so that humanness factors are preserved in future education (Polka, et al, 2014).

### DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

It seems, as is the case now in Poland, that in the future the role of boarding schools will be marginal. The main reasons for this projection are as follows:

- the reluctance of young people and their parents to dormitory "accommodation" dating back several decades
- high cost of maintaining dormitories that is generally higher than the cost of transporting students to schools and back home.
- the development and improvement of the road network which allow better access to educational institutions.
- and, above all, the development of new information technologies that support anywhere and anytime learning and teaching.

Small kindergartens or schools have both their advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include local community bonding and interpersonal relationships, more individualized approach to teaching, and better child-centered educational climate. But, the disadvantages include: higher unit costs of education and generally inferior equipment. Closing of a school, however, results in social environment degradation, and cultural impoverishment within the local and regional area. On the other hand, it is emphasized that small schools limit the choices for students and their parents of foreign languages and other advanced content curricula as well as extracurricular activities.

It seems that the optimal size of the school in Poland is three-four tracks model (i.e. at the level of each class there are 3 - maximum 4 units/groups). One reservation being that "optimal" is a relative term, it is the result of a compromise. In terms of unit costs, the optimum school would be even bigger with more students and classes in one large school facility.

From an educational planning perspective a smaller school is certainly better, but, planners need to keep in mind the aforementioned higher costs (per student and per teacher) of smaller schools as well as the generally inferior equipment, inability to offer some classes, and the problems with filling the teachers' teaching load. These problems can be overcome by organizing the work of teachers in such a way that their required hours of teaching are divided between several schools (a model based on commuting teachers) - but this is not always possible.

From the point of view of the organization of school work, the number of classes/units is no less, and perhaps even more important, than the total number of students. This indicator influences the number of teachers that a school principal should hire, the number of teaching hours allocated to individual subjects, and, consequently, how many teaching hours will be available for individual teachers. In very small schools these difficulties might be overcome by:

- organizing teachers into a combined-class system.
- preparing teachers for teaching at least two subjects. This has been widely discussed in Poland but not effectively dealt with for several decades.

Established structures of the school system in Poland including detailed guidelines on the size of the school and school teaching unit are political decisions that cannot always be predicted. It can be assumed that public, compulsory school will last 12 years in two cycles: 6 + 6 or other combinations. The total number of students in a school should not exceed 300-400 because that is the size that ensures that students are still recognized by the teacher, and that the work of the school can be organized in a proper manner. Numerous documents, international, and national studies, refer to the eight so-called key competences for lifelong learning. Those are internationally known as a recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe of 18 December 2006 and include:

- communication in the mother tongue
- communication in foreign languages
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- digital competence
- learning to learn
- social and civic competences

- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- cultural awareness and expression (Recommendation, 2006).

The above competences are a challenge not only for teachers, principals, teacher trainers, but also, to some extent, also for those who will make decisions concerning educational policy on a local and regional scale since the policy that covers setting the locations of various educational institutions. The mastery of these competences will serve the three strategic objectives of the Polish education system, namely:

- ensuring fair and easy access to education
- providing education of good quality, in accordance with the requirements of the knowledge-based economy
- Adapting the education system to labour market needs.

These objectives are widely accepted in Poland and the general feeling of educators is that they should not be dropped. But, they are, perhaps, too idealistic and not easy to accomplish everywhere. Their completion should be compliant with the principle of sustainable development that has been cited repeatedly in various studies and understood as the type of development which meets both current social needs and the needs of future generations equally.

There are many expert opinions indicating that an attempt to level educational and professional opportunities, that often are the consequence of measurable school achievements, at the primary school level, is belated. Compensating for the shortcomings of the family environment and slower intellectual development of some children should start much earlier with a test of school competences. These assessments should start at the primary school and continue to be used as benchmark references until the completion of the integrated education stage. The fact remains and is supported by the results of most studies (including the OECD - PISA, PIRLS and UNESCO - Education for All) that the family plays a very strong influence on the achievements and educational opportunities of children. Therefore, local, regional, and state educational policies should take into account the family social backgrounds. Some less educated parents, who often were marginalized by the lack of proper education themselves, lack of jobs, succumb to alcoholism, and other social pathologies. The re-education of the parents from these backgrounds should start before enrolling the child in school. This form of educational activity could be implemented in schools, centres for continuing education, or with the help of qualified specialists reaching directly "at risk" families. The number of children's homes and special schools that are being gradually replaced with integration schools will likely decrease in favour of more effective institutions based on the special needs of students. The number of centres treating contemporary technology fostered maladies such as: computer, internet, and mobile device addictions, however, will increase.

It is in the arena of vocational education in Poland that requires contemporary focused decisions and resolutions. Currently, vocational education does not keep pace with the changing needs of the economy and/or the labour market. It seems that in the future this type of educational institutions will be free from the pressures of local government and teachers' lobby. In many cases, the planning formula for determining the structure, the number, and types of training programmes at the level of local, district, and state government levels has proven to be ineffective. Local governments in districts are not always able to reconcile the expectations of the local and the global labour market, and decisions relating to the network of schools and training programmes offered are substantively ungrounded. Moreover, the decisions focus only on the unit cost of education in a particular type of school, personal connections between district and school authorities, and election campaigns contexts. Qualification standards that take into account the expectations of employers will continue to play a crucial role in both in-school and out-of-school vocational training systems. Subsequently, vocational school certificates will confirm gaining specific qualifications. The role of foreign languages in basic vocational subjects' classes will increase, which will result in better preparation for the European labour market and the general recognition of the diplomas. However, practical vocational training, to a greater degree, will be provided out-of-school, at the premises of businesses, services.

New educational technologies will probably be increasingly used in higher education. The risk of a reduction in the number of schools of this type should also be taken into account. At present, small, weak, underperforming schools, those schools whose graduates have trouble

adapting to the labour market, no longer can and will not survive the intense competition. Problems of higher education are aggravated by the demographics of low birth rates and the continuous emigration of prospective students. Growth of the Internet and increasing availability of access to the Network or other, yet unknown, "cyber inventions" will continue to expand their impact on Polish society and education. Cultural and educational experiences may be limited in the areas neglected in socio-economic terms. Literature, increasingly in electronic formats, and specialist literature, including methodological books, will be available for purchase online, rather than in traditional bookstores. Increasingly, the Internet, and not traditional cinemas, will provide access to films. As to educational publications, online bookstores will probably increase their share in the distribution of textbooks, especially in supplying schools and teachers with ancillary educational publications. The situation will be similar with respect to online libraries. Thus, the "look and feel" of the traditional school in Poland, whether in the urban areas or the rural countryside, will continue to evolve as a result of the social, economic, political, and technological changes that occur in our global world.

The importance of non-public schools will grow at all levels of education although a significant amount of their growth depends on the state policy. If the concept of "educational vouchers" is put into practice in its pure, free-market form, which, from time to time, gets public attention through some politicians who do not understand the complexity of education system, the Polish education system will undergo a revolution, especially in the location of schools. Wherever the choice of school will be possible, then some schools will have to close and the borderline between public and non-public schools will continue to blur. Another future variant of the state strategy towards non-public education may involve duplicating the model employed for years in the Netherlands, whereby most schools are private and the state subcontracts them to perform specific educational services and, most importantly, reimburses citizens for the expenses related to the education of their children (Patrinos, 2002). In this approach, the discussion about egalitarianism and elitism of education loses its importance, especially because, as should be anticipated, the student assessment system will be much better than the current one. A fair system of evaluation and selection at different levels of education, should, similarly to the present situation, cover an internal assessment, "teacher's assessment", and the assessment based on improved external examinations.

However, getting closer to objective assessment will be possible not only by improving the already functioning forms of assessment but also by promoting the so-called educational value added (EVA). Such attempts are already made in Poland, and they consist in assessment of, not only, what a student can do and what he/she knows, but also what progress is he/she has made, for example, by measuring "the input" and "output", on entering and on leaving a given stage of education. The idea is to apply different measures to the differences, of environmental character, resulting from cultural and civilizational impairment and selecting also those students, disregarding the absolute value of their assessment, who make the most progress.

## CONCLUSION

The symptoms of change can already be predicted or noticed, the change which is perhaps not directly linked to the location of schools, but which will strongly affect the pedagogic sphere of educational institutions in Poland and should therefore also be included in the premises and planning of educational policy. Strategic planners and policy makers must be prepared for the challenges both well-known and less known, as well as unforeseen, which will be a consequence of demographic and migration processes. The number of children from partnerships (unregistered), and ethnically heterogeneous marriages/registered partnerships will increase. The number of children growing up in single-parent families (without one parent - most often the father) will probably also increase. It should also be taken into account that the influx of immigrants into Poland, very often from very distant and exotic countries, poses challenges to the educational system that require even more decisive action - aimed at shaping the attitudes of openness and tolerance for "the other".

It is also worth noting that the decrease in the school population may be the cause of yet other type of consequences. First - it does not have to result in reducing the financial expenditure on education. The reduction in the entire school population does not mean that the number of students decreases everywhere. There may be migration to some dynamically developing cities, centres of

economic activity, or, within other cities and there may be displacement of population to suburban areas. Thus, despite the declining number of students in the country or specific regions, there may be a need for building new schools and, while at the same time, closing schools in depopulating areas.

It should also be noted that the number of teachers generally decreases much more slowly than school populations, however in Poland, paradoxically, in spite of the decreasing number of students in recent years, the number of teachers increased. Even though the teacher-student ratio decreases, it does not always result in greater individualization of instruction because these changes are not followed by the improvement in the learning process. Without a doubt the process entails the growth of unit costs of education and additional side effects including the aging of teacher population and reduced recruitment of young teachers. This, in turn, may inhibit the introduction of pedagogical innovation, towards which older teachers are less favourably disposed. The demand for teacher training in areas such as working with pupils with special educational needs and the use of new technologies in teaching will increase. At the same time one should be aware that some schools will have to close and some teachers will lose their jobs not only because of the decreasing number of students but also because of the further development of new technologies employed not only in teaching but also in the accumulation of knowledge. There will be a common challenge too, arising everywhere: how to retain the best and the most effective teachers in job. One finding is high performing countries put much more energy into recruiting, preparing, and supporting good teachers, rather than finding ways to work with or fire weak ones (Asia Society, 2010).

As a result, strategic planning for educational success in Poland is very critical, as there are important challenges, issues, and goals that need to be addressed. However, it appears, that for various reasons, such plans will be difficult to develop due to changing demographical trends (e.g., declining population), but, those strategic plans will have to be very creative as well as bound to the practical essence of what great education can look like in Poland's future. And, those plans will need to be examined in light of Polish educational history because, as this article has portrayed, sometimes it was positive for the Polish people and their children that some of the educational schemes and plans of the past went awry. Let's hope that the educational planners in Poland have learned from their past and approach their future with vigor and enthusiasm to develop targeted, pragmatic, yet flexible strategic plans that are based on the best interests of the children and their future. Hopefully in 100 years, educational planners will analyze if there was "promised joy" from those plans and schemes developing today or was there simply more "grief and pain" because the predictions went awry and/or the open-social system of Poland experienced new dramatic changes precipitated by mega, macro, or micro environment evolutions.

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# Strategic Planning in Higher Education: Plans, Pauses, Perils and Persistence

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## ABSTRACT

*The strategic planning process requires considerable detail, much of which is covered in traditional literature on strategic planning. Using actual and existing strategic plans as example, we discuss aspects of strategic planning in academic settings that are often not addressed. We present a list of action items that should be considered as part of any strategic planning process, speaking to their value in the case of the example plans. One important action item is assurance that one's plan, when formed and when implemented, is robust enough to weather unexpected circumstances like the financial surprises that arrived when recently-minted plans were launched. We also present cautions that require awareness and appropriate action as a strategic plan is created or implemented, again using example plans as case-study guides.*

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT THESE REFLECTIONS COVER

This paper describes select elements of the strategic planning process, using actual and existing strategic plans as exemplary models for discussion. Rather than provide a comprehensive overview of typical strategic planning and implementation processes, this paper illuminates elements of strategic planning and execution of a strategic plan that can help or hinder the plan's ultimate success. Many of these items are not typically described in strategic planning literature; our hope is to provide "insider tips" for those engaged in planning process or implementation.

We base our discussion around "Action Items," with some Items supplemented by "Cautionary Tales." Throughout, we use actual strategic plans as *ex post facto* "sounding boards" for each Action and Tale to help guide the reader toward effective planning and execution. In Section 1, we cover issues associated with creating a plan. This section is short because the goal of this paper is not to walk the reader through the planning process in a "soup to nuts" way, but, rather, to highlight tips that may not be covered in typical writings about strategic planning. Section 2 outlines robust features of a good strategic plan that may not be typically covered in the literature. Section 3 discusses dynamics related to implementation of a given plan. In this case, we outline several surprises that erupted during implementation of a recently-executed plan, most of which were related to unexpected financial challenges. Though these are specific to the current era, one can always count on (expect!) unexpected issues to arise. Section 4 discusses issues related to termination of a given plan and the transition to a new one. We conclude with a summary of the twenty Action Items and Tales of Caution around which this paper is organized.

As a faculty member at five institutions, a dean at one, and a vice president for academic affairs at another, my involvement with strategic planning was comprehensive. I was involved with all the strategic plans cited in this publication. At one institution, I was a member of the president's cabinet, which was responsible for creating its plan, and, because the plan focused almost entirely on academic issues, I was also closely involved with the plan's implementation. As a result, I had to broker, directly, many of the challenges we encountered and compromises we made during the plan's execution phase.

## FROM PRIMORDIAL TO FLESH: CREATING A PLAN

For an overview of the strategic planning process, one can consult many available references, including books by Argenti (1968), Olsen (2012), Allison and Kaye (2003), and Burkhart and

Reuss (1993). The latter two are specific to nonprofit organizations. Here, we cover four Action Items that one should always consider as part of the planning process.

### *Action Item 1: Consult with Everybody in Sight.*

Even though this paper attempts to cover items not widely discussed in the literature, we must lead off with ample encouragement concerning consultation because broad consultation is arguably the most crucial need in the strategic planning process; it can affect a plan's success dramatically. Though a particular management team will be charged with deciding what the strategic plan will ultimately be (animated by the initiatives the team selects), the team and the plan need to have input from a comprehensive set of community constituents. This is especially important when mobilizing an organization around the plan's ideas as implementation begins: if the planning stage does not involve sufficient participation, debates concerning the merits or challenges of given ideas in the plan (and also the many more that did not "make the cut" in the plan's formation, but still linger in colleagues' minds) will be end up comprising campus and "hallway" talk—and inevitable controversy that will diminish or even dismiss a plan's chances of success. This is especially true in the case of faculty buy-in in academic settings. Broad consultation, on the other hand, allows debates and discussions to take place *prior* to the plan's implementation phase, clearing space for the focus that is necessary for the plan's initiatives to succeed. Though not all parties will be satisfied with the outcomes of the planning process and the initiatives selected for a given plan, associates will be more disposed to accept the plan if they have assurance that their input was valued and considered.

The leadership team in charge of a given plan must assure that it understands who the plan's stakeholders are. In academic settings, this typically includes faculty of all types, staff groups, students, administrators, and "less internal" constituents like alumni. One must be sure to include parties that may be perceived to be "smaller voices"; this is discussed below as Action Item 3.

In a recent case of an East Coast Jesuit university, the deciding body was the President's Cabinet.<sup>1</sup> As part of the planning process, the university began by gathering ideas through meetings with faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni, donors, and parent groups. Dozens of meetings were held over a period of roughly two years. As is typical in the academe, receiving formal acceptance of the plan by a formal governance body—in this case, a group of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, with the faculty being the most active members of the group—was the greatest challenge. As its planning evolved, the university moved from conversational stages to written draft-plan stages. At each stage, the strength of proposed ideas were weighed and evaluated, largely through discussion, though, at times, more formal evaluative measures were employed. During the last year of the planning phase, prior to formal presentation to the appropriate governance bodies, the president appointed a formal drafting group, which was led by the associate vice president for academic affairs. This group included representatives from all appropriate campus constituencies. It formally drafted at least eight versions of its plan, each with subversions. As is common in the academe, the conversations became more serious (and at times, more strident) once ideas began to appear in ink.

As the Drafting Committee's work proceeded, several key groups vetted formal ideas that remained under consideration, or they contributed additional ideas to the mix. Many of the latter used prior ideas as ingredients. Using input from all bodies who had worked on the plan prior to this phase, the President's Cabinet suggested 25 candidate initiatives; a broadly configured "summer task force" suggested 17; academic department chairs suggested two; and the Student Development directors suggested two. This process ended with 33 specific candidate initiatives that were slated for review by the President's Cabinet; these were grouped into five broad

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<sup>1</sup> Deciding bodies and approving bodies are often different. In this case, the approving (formally, the accountable and a consulted) body was the university's Board of Trustees. Formal assignments of responsibility are discussed in Action Item/Cautionary Tale 4.

categories. The Cabinet and the Summer Task Force had considerable correspondence in selections of the initiatives: 10 of the items were suggested by both bodies.

Using Likert scales, members of the President's Cabinet expressed degrees of importance associated with each of the 33 candidate initiatives, and then discussed the outcomes of this exercise. As we will see later, only eight items made the final cut for the plan. One may hold that the Cabinet, in this case, made too many decisions in the planning process. While that argument may hold some weight, nearly all the ideas associated with the final 33 suggestions were sourced from the broader university community—many of them directly. One can think of the process as a funnel, with the broader community at the top, and the President's Cabinet, the formal acting governance bodies, and the Board of Trustees, who had final approval of the plan, at the bottom. As planning proceeds, the scope of consultation becomes limited to governance bodies charged with decision-making.

### *Action Item 2: Engage A Qualified Consultant.*

Having been involved in strategic planning processes with and without an external consultant, I have become convinced that using an external consultant to guide the process is valuable to a plan's ultimate success and the organization's health as planning and execution go forward.

A good consultant brings not only seasoned experience, but also efficiencies in plan formation, a more global perspective than "local" organizational personnel may have, and neutrality in discussing and helping vet ideas that are locally controversial. Beyond exhibiting neutrality, a good consultant can identify and help an institution work through any internal biases it may have that should be reconsidered, while also being able to challenge any form of "groupthink" that exists within a particular constituency. This is especially important for groups that may have central powers of decision. Overall, one should also be sure that a selected consultant brings an ability to communicate with multiple and varied communities. One university used RJ Valentino and Kathy Jones of the Napa Group as consultants for its plan formation and felt well served during and following the programming through which the Napa Group guided the process.

### *Action Item 3: Know That Perceived Smaller Voices May Bring Greatest Gifts.*

One must be sure during the planning process's consultations that communications with constituents are not exclusively geared toward obtaining necessary buy-in. This is especially true when working with formal governance organizations. Rather, one should be disposed toward understanding that the ultimate reason for vetting elements and drafts of a plan are to ensure that the plan is indeed as strong as it might be in ideation and in potential for implementation. With this in mind, I often caution colleagues not to ask, "Does this have to go through [a governance body—say, an Academic Senate]?" but, rather, to adopt an attitude that a given idea "gets to go through" a given governance body. Such a disposition can be helpful in academic administration, in general; in strategic planning settings, it is crucial.

Adopting such a disposition opens a plan's leadership team to valuable ideas that may be dismissed because they come from voices that are perceived or considered to be less powerful, or are traditionally rendered less powerful.

A recent case provides an instructive example of this Action Item's benefits. Prior to its recent strategic plan, the university was known for its study abroad programming, which engaged nearly two-thirds of its undergraduate student body.<sup>2</sup> Because, however, the university was relatively weak in international student enrollments and in globally-oriented curriculum and learning opportunities for students on its home campus, most constituencies—and especially

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<sup>2</sup> Quality and participation were strengthened further during the years associated with the Strategic Plan. The university received a national award for its study abroad activity and also placed highly in the nation in study abroad participation for universities in its category twice over a five-year period, as documented in the Institute of International Education's (2014) *Open Doors Reports*.

leaders of the university's Board of Trustees—spoke of a need to take positive action concerning on-campus international presence.

An early draft of the university's strategic plan contained what most members of the campus community saw as an innovative formulation for leveraging the institution's success in study abroad to expand significantly the presence of international students on campus. I authored it. Following distribution and discussions of the draft plan, a collection of students, led by a sophomore who was the President and founder of the university's International Affairs Association, a student-run group seeking to bring more international interest and awareness to its campus, wrote to the chair of the Drafting Committee. The student explained that, while the draft plan's global initiative was exciting, the specifics needed to be reprioritized toward intensifying efforts devoted to its Global Studies Program. At that time, Global Studies was the university's only interdisciplinary undergraduate major; it was relatively new but had quickly garnered nearly 100 students. Though it was well stewarded, it was still largely the province of its founding faculty member and seemed poised for expanded emphasis.

The student's powerfully expressed suggestions made more sense than mine, at the time, and the President's Cabinet was resilient in adopting them. As a result, the Global Studies Program became a major (what we describe below as a "Spotlight") initiative of the university's plan. Following more detailed planning and an eventual launch of a comprehensive (fundraising) campaign, the Global Studies Program ended up garnering the largest gift in the university's history, at \$5 million. This episode demonstrates the value of considering a typically less powerful voice as primary: without an open mind toward student input, this plan would have been less strong, and the university would probably not have fared as well as it did by adopting the student-driven initiative.

#### *Action Item/Cautious Tale 4: Who Owns The Plan?*

Most literature concerning the execution of strategic initiatives recommends that various tasks be assigned to "owners" who will be responsible for the initiatives. A good plan must articulate appropriate tasks, responsibilities, and authorities. Literature on project management typically advocates for such arrangements (Jacka & Keller, 2009, p. 255; Cleland & Ireland, 2007, p. 234), but academic leaders are often not experienced with them, so we discuss them here. One compelling arrangement, laid out in Jacka and Keller (2009), is known as an *ARCI scheme*. The *ARCI* scheme assigns strategic planning actors to four groups:

- *Accountable*: The *A* group are those (usually just one person) who are *Accountable* for a given task's completion. One can think of the *A* group (or party) as the individual(s) "on whose desk" the success or failure of the project lands. Typically, this is somebody at the executive level.
- *Responsible*: The *R* group is *Responsible* for the execution of the task. That is, the *R* group carries out the work associated with it.
- *Consulted*: The *C* group consists of parties who are *consulted* as the project takes place; these are parties who can provide appropriate feedback on actions taken and on options that may be explored.
- *Informed*: Finally, the *I* group consists of parties who need to be *Informed* as actions, including decisions, take place.

We note that the *Consulted* and *Informed* groups differ in the style of communication as the *Accountable* or *Responsible* groups engage with them: typically, dialogue occurs in a back-and-forth manner with the *Consulted* group, while information passes into, but not from, the *Informed* group.

Clarity concerning each of these groups can make a project more efficient and more effective, often because it defines appropriate roles, helps all involved understand those roles, and then assures that all appropriate parties are involved in accordance with those roles. It keeps planners and implementers from having an "Oh, my, we should have known to consult with *x*" moment, and it assures from the outset that all involved know each other's roles. One can see that, in the case of a strategic plan, the *ARCI* scheme allows a plan's ownership to be parceled out across the

organization so that multiple parties can have relevant roles, while still maintaining appropriate lines of authority.

As noted above, academic leaders are typically not versed in project management. For example, the leadership team in an Academic Affairs division with which I was involved learned of it through consultants, Tedd Smith of Tedd Smith Consulting, LLC, and Karen Pell (independent), who had been engaged to refine Academic Affairs' organization and performance. At a wider level, though, as part of its planning process, the university had not assigned ultimate "owners" to its strategic initiatives and their execution. Because most of the university's strategic plan's "spotlight" initiatives were in the academic realm, the division of Academic Affairs adopted them by default. From there, the division developed and used *ARCI* assignments (what we called "*ARCI* Charts"). These were typically created at a summer retreat for use during each academic year.

In the case cited immediately above, by default (via formal university governance), the university president was the strategic plan's ultimate authority. The president therefore occupied the *A* role in the *ARCI* scheme. From there, however, the university still never assigned any other "keepers" of the plan's execution and initiatives. Because of a lack of formal assignments, data related to the plan and its execution were scattered across several divisions—some were in Academic Affairs, some were with the executive vice president's office, and some were held in the finance office. At times, this led to inefficiencies and confusion, and, one may argue, slowed down components of the execution of the university's plan. The university also experienced challenges in establishing appropriate benchmarks and dashboards that helped summarize and communicate landmark accomplishments associated with its plan, as described in the next section. On reflection, the use of a formal tool like an *ARCI* scheme at highest organizational levels would have helped the quality of the execution of this plan.

#### SING THE BODY ELECTRIC: WHAT MAKES A GOOD PLAN?

What should one look for in assessing the quality of a strategic plan? In this section, we provide five Action Items and two Cautionary Tales that deserve consideration. Many of these are from one university's plan, which had some features that are not common in strategic planning literature, but were key to the plan's success.

##### *Action Item 5: Establish And Communicate An Audacious, Unifying Vision.*

Typically, a strategic plan requires resources for it to succeed. These are usually procured through fundraising campaigns; often the campaigns are built around strategic initiatives. Because strategic goals are usually "stretch" goals, the campaigns must be fueled by inspiring messages. Often, goals set internally, one by one, are more readily inspiring for those who set them than they are for constituents who are less directly related to the institution (e.g., alumni of a school—typically the primary candidates for fundraising sources). An *audacious vision*, consistent with the definition of "audacious" (e.g., in the Google Search Dictionary (2014)), demonstrates a willingness to take bold risks. Such a disposition can inspire the sources on whom a strategic plan relies for support. The audacity of the vision gets people talking, gets them involved, and motivates participation. When the vision is also uniform, it serves as a point of leverage from which constituents are drawn more deeply into the details of the plan. The goal also helps motivate internal participants to carry out the work associated with the plan.

As one university's strategic plan began to take shape, its president set an audacious vision: "to be the leading Catholic comprehensive institution in the nation." This goal brought several challenges, but it was ultimately a worthwhile step. Without question, the goal represented a huge, and possibly an unattainable, step. Even though the goal may not have been attained as the university's plan was implemented, having such an ambitious goal helped the university's constituencies to focus on the plan and strive to attain its goals. Furthermore, the goal became well known among members of the university community and united all involved around a common theme. As the plan proceeded, one could ask any member of the university community

what the goal of the plan was, and chances were good they would have responded precisely and correctly.

Of course, an audacious vision also brings challenges. For this university, these started with how one might define attainment of becoming the leading Catholic comprehensive university in the nation. The university elected to engage its institutional research personnel to self-define what such attainment would look like. Unfortunately, as noted in the previous section, this process was not accompanied by development of professional dashboards, and the indicators of success were not consistently communicated as the plan's implementation was underway. Such tools, if appropriately configured, can bring recognizable data and confirmation to attainment of goals, thereby bonding with the audacious, uniform vision of the strategic plan. Though this university assembled superb detailed annual reports of what had and had not been accomplished in its plan, the lack of consistent, understandable, and well-communicated dashboards confounded execution, at times, and the lack of dashboards has left only a heuristic sense of when the plan should be formally concluded.

A second challenge related to the university's audacious, uniform theme was that it allowed dissenting opinion—related to the plan or to other university issues—to rally around the goal's audacity, framing the goal as a dream never to be realized, and not realized yet. In this sense, one's audacious, uniform vision can give leverage to harmful dissent. That noted, in our example case, the many pros of the plan's audacious vision outweighed challenges associated with it.

#### *Action Item 6: "Long Live The Plan!?" No: Short-Life The Plan!*

Circumstances and needs related to education are presently undulating at paces more rapid than was the case in the recent past. For this and for other reasons, strategic plans that are executed over shorter periods of time allow an institution to remain current and shift priorities more rapidly than institutions engaged in longer-term plans.

#### *Beware 15- and 20-year plans!*

Most institutions engaged even in ten- and especially twenty-year plans (which used to be typical intervals for plans) frequently have to engage in repeated customizations or reformulations of their strategy. These activities are usually saddled with plan visions that were struck many years ago—at times by persons no longer with the institution. Those charged with reformulating the plans are therefore often restricted as they seek to find ways to adapt yesterday's ideas to today's circumstances. In fact, the process can feel like wrapping today's circumstances around yesterday's ideas.

Some plans may seem immune to such concerns about their length because their strategic visions are broad enough to capture issues that may emerge ten to twenty years from their inception. This represents another plan hazard: Plan visions that are general enough to admit twenty-years-hence circumstances are necessarily too broad in scope, if not too generic (e.g., "to excel in teaching, scholarship, and service"). This lack of focus and specificity brings about a void in the institutional community, if not ignorance of the plan that is contrary to the excitement and motivating qualities discussed above as we surveyed the merits of an audacious, uniform vision. When the main strategic structure is general enough to engulf social, fiscal, and generational upheavals, it is not likely to be effectively "carried" by personnel and resource providers who otherwise might exercise ambition in accomplishing the plan's goals.

With these thoughts in mind, one may argue that the wisest element of one university's plan was its five-year duration of implementation. Five-year strategic plans are a tradition at that has served this university well. Even where certain needs related to a given plan remains unrealized, plans typically get old and dry, and imagination and zeal associated with their execution can wane. With the university now near the terminus of its execution cycle, with considerable success in meeting its plan's goals, and even with some goals not accomplished, many members of the its community seem to be experiencing, and some are expressing, a need for strategic renewal.

One should also note that a relatively short plan also makes an organization more nimble in the event that environmental circumstances demand a revision or even an abandonment of a given plan. Though we do not survey such circumstances in this paper, we can assure that should they arise (and they are likely to!), changing or canceling a shorter-term plan is considerably easier than doing so with a longer plan that is more deeply entrenched in organizational culture and commitment.

*Action Item 7: Create A Small Number Of Tight Spotlight Initiatives That Drive Toward The Audacious, Uniform Vision; Relegate Ongoing (Including Ambitious) Activities To Appendices.*

Arguably the biggest challenge to typical strategic plans is their breadth. Plans can take the form of an elaborate “mass feeding” in which each division, if not department, of a given institution has some stake in the plan. Often, when planning, the main question being asked is one posed to each facet of the operation, revolving around what that operation may need. A better approach works at a higher level: though all needs and all ideas must be vetted, and vetted responsibly, as described in Action Item 3, above, those who are responsible for the plan must assure that the plan ends up focused on a *tight, limited subset* of the institution’s activities. Inevitably, this means that

*Those responsible for drafting the plan must be prepared to deny inclusion of valuable ideas.*

Why is this so? Typically, organizations, largely writ, have *a priori* resource capacities. The main ones are (1) the capacity to carry out the work of the plan and (2) the capacity to finance the plan.

Often, in selecting strategies, planners are reticent to consider that many of those who are expected to carry out a plan’s tasks are already working at full capacity. This is to be expected: the most ambitious members of the organization, who are usually its most busy, are the ones most likely to provide brightest innovations for inclusion in the plan. Though the plan, if successful, may eventually secure resources that permit appropriate expansion of a given operation to accommodate a new initiative, even the planning of the new initiative and the procurement of resources in the implementation phase of the plan can be intense. Planners need to be mindful of the likelihood of this situation.

Planners can also lack awareness that, typically, fundraising efforts are ongoing, and that they may also be already “maxed out.” If the institution is at an appropriate “pause” phase between capital campaigns and is readying for a next major campaign cycle, it may be prepared to amplify its efforts to procure resources. But even in this case, planners must not set sights on goals that will require unnatural (beyond capacity) boosts in fundraising. The easiest way to bring about such fate is to include too many, or too many ambitious initiatives in the plan.

Limitations in capacity underscore the importance of having an audacious, uniform vision as a motivator. But limitations will also indeed require planners to reject for inclusion ideas that are valuable in favor of ideas that are more valuable (or at least more consistent with the audacious, uniform vision). Planners also have to consider resources required for each initiative’s planning and implementation, relating them carefully to the institution’s capacities (most importantly, one may argue, its personnel’s and volunteers’ time). In some cases, a capacity study in fundraising will guide a limit to the plan’s summed (fiscal) needs, but such studies typically do not analyze available time.

All of these considerations drive us to a mantra:

*Planners must assure inclusivity in the planning process, but strategic planning outcomes cannot be fully inclusive.*

A best way to assure that this takes place is to use the concept of “spotlight” initiatives, which the Napa Group’s RJ Valentino advocated for a recent university during its planning process. Spotlight initiatives comprise the plan’s main specific goals, and they are the ones determined to drive the organization most directly toward attainment of its main vision.

The university’s plan worked well using this strategy. The plan featured just eight Spotlight initiatives, total, spread over five general areas. These were in:

- Undergraduate Education
  - Spotlight on a universal first-year living-learning program
  - Spotlight on the natural sciences and student scholarship in them
- Graduate Education
  - Spotlight on formation of a school of education and renown for the business schools and some clinical centers
  - Spotlight on the graduate student experience, no matter which of the three university campuses a given student attends
- Faculty Development
  - Spotlight on faculty support, including a universal pre-tenure research leave
- Community Engagement
  - Spotlight on a Global Studies Program
  - Spotlight on a local community in need, and
- Athletics
  - Spotlight on the university’s athletic facilities and the fan experience.<sup>3</sup>

Though the union of the five main areas is clearly too broadly encompassing, the Spotlight Initiatives within each of them—just one or two in each of the main areas—focused the plan toward specific issues. Even where a given area looks too broad, as is the case in the first Spotlight of the Graduate Education initiative, the text of the goals assured limitation in scope. For example, for the university’s business school, the goal was to ensure greater renown, and not to, say, reach a given threshold in enrollments.

While the use of spotlight initiatives necessarily will force some good ideas to be left “on the cutting room floor,” planners must also decide whether and how to include initiatives that is already underway. One has two options in doing this. A first method is to summarize the activities currently in progress and include them as goals of the plan. The value of doing this is that it can bring about more internal “buy-in” because it shines light on activities in which members of the community are already engaged, with their work now recognized as part of a larger, unifying vision. Inclusion of ongoing initiatives also gives a plan some momentum, in that partial successes already accomplished can be “counted” as part of the plan’s attainments, and some initiatives already underway may reach conclusion relatively early, allowing for success stories that can drive a plan’s wider success further.

A second method for inclusion of ongoing initiatives is to relegate them to an appendix or companion document of the strategic plan. The idea here is that such initiatives, while remaining important, and while receiving assurance of support, is not deemed to be the fresh initiatives that will make a significant difference relative to the plan’s main vision. This separates out and places a highlight on the newer initiatives that are deemed to be “difference makers.”

The above university selected the second strategy, relegating important initiatives already underway as the plan was inked—including some deemed critical, like faculty compensation and specific diversity initiatives—to an appendix of the plan entitled, “Ongoing Initiatives.” These initiatives were not meant to be diminished in priority by being placed in the appendices; rather,

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<sup>3</sup> Though this paper does not discuss the financial dimensions of strategic planning, we note for completeness that the plan used as an example here was set to require roughly \$5 million in new expenditures, across a five-year trajectory.

they were not considered to be new Spotlights that would ultimately propel the university toward its audacious, unifying vision. Though this might have led to controversy, the clarity with which the plan was presented helped members of the university community understand the appropriate rationale for how the initiatives were listed. That stated, failure to commit to at least one important Ongoing Initiative also led to challenges as the plan's execution took place. This is discussed in Action Item/Cautionary Tale 10, below

***Action Item 8: Sew Parallel Strategic Streams Into The Plan's Spotlights.***

Often, institutions may have wide, ongoing "reach" goals that are too broad or too "vanilla" to be part of an inspirational strategic plan. These can be accomplished, at least in part, by assuring congruence between them and initiatives that are selected for the strategic plan. I use an experiential example to demonstrate how this can be done.

As a leader at one institution, my overarching vision for helping the institution realize its mission was to strengthen its faculty further, largely through hiring. Increasing the university's diversity was key to any improvement: prior to implementation of the university's strategic plan, its faculty diversity was strikingly absent. This was true in many dimensions, including the presence of faculty of color, who comprised just 9% of the institution's full-time faculty. Meanwhile, the university's faculty culture for grant acquisition needed significant overhaul; largely because of its legacy financial well being, it had not developed a culture of grant seeking that was common at its peer institutions. With university budgets increasingly threatened in higher education, and with the university beginning to experience fiscal challenges along with its sibling institutions, the need for enhanced grant application activity had become acute. On a simpler level, the institution's faculty were not seeking funding in ways consonant with their success in scholarly production.

Through the development of the university's strategic plan, we were able to address these necessities as parts of the plan's Spotlight Initiatives. For example, over 60% of the plan's Spotlight Initiatives had faculty hiring as part of the plan's execution; these included a living-learning Spotlight, a natural sciences Spotlight, a faculty development Spotlight, a graduate programming Spotlight, and a global studies Spotlight. Over a period of six years, we hired 59 new tenured or tenure-track faculty;<sup>4</sup> because of other factors leading to faculty replacements (retirements, moves, deaths, and so on), we made 136 new tenured or tenure-track hires during a six-year period. This allowed us to have roughly 48% of our full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty appointed within a seven-year span. In parallel with the strategic plan, my division initiated an ambitious hiring program that leveraged current faculty's successes to improve the faculty further as we underwent the new hires. Key to this improvement was an expansion in diversity in all dimensions—including improving the presence of faculty of color to 18% and a marked increase in faculty born in places other than the United States. Most members of the university community, including the legacy faculty who carried out most of the work associated with hiring, are proud that, during execution of the strategic plan, the university experienced a bright renewal of its faculty.

We also leveraged a faculty development initiative to increase grant application activity. Prior to the institution of a new pre-tenure research leave program, we offered a total of nine internal sabbaticals per year to pre-tenure tenure-track faculty. These grants were awarded through an internal competition. Our pre-tenure research leave program gave every pre-tenure faculty member the opportunity to take a semester's leave, at full pay, provided they submit an external grant to an agency approved by their chair and dean. This significantly improved the number of grants submitted by the university's faculty, which grew by 69% over the last five years; we anticipate the new program will bring significant increases in grant procurement in the

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<sup>4</sup> Not all of these were fully-new lines; 18 of the positions were "conversions" of full-time non-tenured and non-tenure-track positions to tenure-track or tenured positions. We deemed these investments worthwhile because they increased the institution's scholarly impact, provided deeper and more lasting knowledge of university mission within the faculty, and lowered the average service load per tenured or tenure-track faculty member.

years to come. The program engages faculty in the grants process at the outset of their careers, while also helping personnel in the institution's office of research and sponsored programs to learn immediately about the specific work in which the new faculty are engaged.

Though none of the faculty renewal, diversity, and grants-related outcomes were related directly to this university's strategic plan's Spotlight Initiatives, the initiatives gave us a platform from which it accomplish them, including necessary resources. This is a key element of a successful strategic plan.

*Action Item 9: Set A Time Line, But Announce And Anticipate Annual Revisions Of It.*

The provision and understanding of a dynamic time line should be included in a successful strategic plan, especially given the speed at which circumstances can change for academic institutions in the current era. As is well documented, higher education suffered serious setbacks in recent years in meeting its fiscal requirements. Though it had not anticipated it, one university encountered myriad fiscal challenges nearly immediately after its strategic plan was birthed. For the first time in many years, budgetary projections, largely because of factors external to the university (e.g., stock market and other valuations associated with its endowment, diminished state funding provisions, near-complete disappearance of short-term interest revenues, challenges for families during and following the recession), forced the university to delay some of its plan's more fiscally ambitious initiatives.

Though few in higher education had predicted the challenges that beset the academe's fiscal health, this university's strategic planning execution weathered the new environment well. From the plan's very beginning—even when the plan was in draft stages—the university included an annual re-assessment feature as a fixture of the plan. All presentations of the plan included clear reminders that any time lines associated with the plan were subject to revision, including annually. This allowed the university to delay implementation of a major living-and-learning program twice, without much fanfare (though some faculty held that the delays were signs that the relatively-controversial program would never be realized). The feature also allowed the university to extend the length of the plan's implementation, as was appropriate, given the financial challenges that accompanied the active years of the plan. The plan is presently extended by two years beyond the university's original intent; following or during the creation of a next plan, the plan will be formally concluded.

The financial circumstances that brought about pauses in this university's plan brought new challenges that have, in part, compromised its success. This is described in the following two Cautionary Tales.

*Action Item/Cautionary Tale 10: Do Not Ignore/"Remove" Your Appendix!*

As noted above, one university wisely elected to relegate several key ongoing initiatives to an appendix of its plan. Unfortunately, as the plan's length was extended and fiscal challenges mounted, some key elements of the plan's Ongoing Initiatives section were abandoned. The most serious of these was the university's faculty compensation agreement, which was approved by the university Board of Trustees, the university president, and the university's faculty at the same time the strategic plan was launched. The compensation agreement contained benchmark salary goals that all parties expected would be met across the five-year time period associated with the plan.

Unfortunately, the university made little significant progress toward meeting the goals of the compensation plan. As the Board of Trustees and new leadership in the university finance office strove to keep the institution fiscally stable under unexpected new circumstances, new priorities—e.g., setting aside monies for funded depreciation—emerged. Despite strong arguments by the Faculty and some administrative personnel, the University changed course, electing to devote new monies to financial initiatives that were not in place when the strategic plan and compensation agreement were launched. Part of this is understandable, given the dynamic nature of university financing and the present environment associated with it. But one should also observe that, as

time went on, new Trustees and university personnel replaced members of the Board and colleagues who were more familiar with the compensation agreement, and especially with the agreement's inclusion as part of the strategic plan. On reflection, with the compensation agreement relegated to an appendix, it probably did not receive the presentational fanfare with the Trustees and other members of the university community that it arguably should have.

Two lessons can be learned here. The first is stark and simple: establishing significant new priorities during execution of a strategic plan is likely to hinder the accomplishment of at least one of the plan's priorities. The second is that, though one can be wise to relegate ongoing initiatives to places in a given plan that may receive less attention, one must still be vigilant in keeping those initiatives in prioritized positions that allow them to progress appropriately, especially as new colleagues arrive as implementation goes forward. This makes for a strong argument for convenient, easily grasped dashboards that summarize a plan's accomplishments.

*Action Item/Cautious Tale 11: Keep The Vision Alive.*

In the section above on audacious goal-setting, we noted the value of having an ambitious, noteworthy vision. One university with an admirable goal has experienced a diminished discussion of its vision: the zeal for the unifying phrase can and should be more readily used in campus conversations than it presently is. Two factors seem to have led to the reduction. Time is one: no matter how audacious or exciting a given vision is, keeping it active or instilling it into the hearts of new personnel can be a challenge. Also, specific to this university's case, shifted emphases to financial survival and well being, caused by dramatic changes in the higher educational environment, have diminished excitement around the president's main vision relative to where it was at the outset of the plan's execution. No matter what the circumstances, most would agree that, until a given plan is formally abandoned, the vision of the plan should be emphasized continually.

### RUNNING THE 5K: REALIZING THE PLAN<sup>5</sup>

The execution of a strategic plan is not without challenges, and it relates closely to many of the issues that surround the planning process. We note that suggestions in this section relate tightly to several of the issues that were discussed above.

*Action Item 12: Tie The Plan To Budgeting, Allocation, And Annual Review Processes.*

Strategic plans should include provisions related to how and when the plan will operate, fiscally. A provision for re-evaluation is key, as are ties to annual budgetary and resource allocation processes. This provides a formal bond between strategy and implementation.

We noted above that one university announced at the outset of its plan's execution that it would re-evaluate the plan annually, and that community members could expect changes based on those evaluations. Each annual evaluation at this university considers the plan's goals relative to the current and coming budgets, and the institution's formal budget allocation processes always include the plan and its initiatives as line items.

At the outset of the plan's execution, a master schedule linked plan initiatives to specific dates that spanned the plan's intended years of duration. As the plan moved forward, each year's draft budgets included the appropriate initiatives. As part of annual budget conversations, the university had to determine which of the slated initiatives were to implement; where necessary, appropriate bodies also determined which slated initiatives were to be delayed until consideration in the following fiscal year's processes.

These activities were key to healthy execution of the university's plan, and they allowed members of the university community to stay focused on implementation of the plan amidst challenging fiscal circumstances by instituting appropriate delays. On the short side, the

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<sup>5</sup> I use "5K" here to remind that 5-year plans are better than longer ones.

university has yet to realize some of the hires associated with two of its plan's major spotlights. But nearly all the other initiatives have been accomplished, with several of them fully implemented and even performing beyond original expectations. Given the many unexpected challenges that beset higher education during the duration of the plan, this speaks to the quality of the plan and the work and support of the many people who contributed to its activities.

As one considers their plan in light of budgets and resource allocation, one may also consider other evaluative processes. For example, as part of one university's response to the ten-year evaluation by its accrediting body, the university evaluated its budgeting decisions and allocations in light of data related to assessments of student learning. This process was forged with considerations related to the strategic plan.

*Action Item 13: Let The Plan Drive Development Operations/Campaigns.*

In creating a strategic plan, one is wise to involve the development operation, and one is also wise to assure that the plan's focus is adopted by that organization. Many institutions engage in capital campaigns to procure resources for the kinds of initiatives that naturally belong to vital strategic plans. This brings about a great potential for symbiosis between a given strategic plan and a capital campaign. In a best of worlds, leadership in development should be part of the strategic planning process so that likelihoods of funding and interests can be matched with strategic initiatives under consideration. Of course, this can misdirect what may be best pathways for an institution, but one must caution that any pathway unfunded is a pathway unrealized.

Campaigns also work well with the short-window plans we advocate in Action Item 6. A typical campaign has a five-year duration; this corresponds with our recommendation of a five-year plan. Timing issues, however, can present challenges. A campaign cannot be prepared in a vacuum, and for it to correspond to a strategic plan, the strategic plan must be complete, or at least nearly complete, as campaign planning is shoring up. One wants to avoid concluding a given strategic plan while fundraising initiatives associated with its goals are still active; this can happen when the plan arrives too far in advance of the campaign. With this in mind, organizations are wise to consider strategic planning and fundraising initiatives in tandem with one another, especially when considering time lines associated with them.

Another issue is one of focus: development operations should focus as strongly as possible on initiatives that are concerted with the strategic plan. This draws donors toward the plan's initiatives, and it can be motivating to personnel responsible for fundraising.

In one university's case, changes in leadership caused campaign planning to start roughly two years after its strategic plan's implementation began. As it was planning a comprehensive fundraising campaign, the university's advancement division announced internally that it would not actively seek to raise funds other than for initiatives associated with the strategic plan. Though the division has welcomed donations for many other initiatives, it has only actively promoted, as part of its campaign, (1) initiatives associated with the plan and (2) student tuition support. This has helped energize the campaign and those associated with it: the plan benefits when campaign support for it materializes, and those involved in fundraising benefit by being able to "shop" initiatives that have broad exposure and sufficient excitement within various campus communities. For example, when students linked to a give initiative that is a plan Spotlight are featured in a university's official magazine, all alumni, including those considering making gifts to the university, can share in some of the wonder that the featured program has generated.

*Action Item/Cautious Tale 14: Keep The Spotlights Focused.*

Once a strategic plan's goals are announced—especially those that are overarching or visionary—members of an organization seeking to have new initiatives approved will quickly map their ideas to the plan. This is true even when the ideas are not specifically part of the plan.

The challenges here run parallel to the ones with which planners engage when they are determining what the strategic plan will include: not all good ideas can go forward. Perhaps the

greatest challenge when executing a prioritized plan is not having resources available to fuel new ideas that are generated after the plan has become active.

A colleague may come in with bright, ambitious goals and bright ways of attaining them while a given strategic plan is underway. The academic leader must be prepared for two situations that require delicate diplomacy. A first occurs when the colleague has mapped their desired initiative to the strategic plan's main vision. In this case, the leader, if not able to fund the new idea, must explain that the plan's defined Spotlights simply have to have priority while the plan is active, no matter what their relative merits.

One experienced this as part of its "Leading Catholic Comprehensive" overarching vision. Time and again, visitors to my office would lead off presentations of new ideas as being directed toward, if not a piece of, this vision; hence, the new ideas were presented as being "part of" the strategic plan. I learned to be prepared for this, as should be anybody involved with executing a strategic plan. I had to assure colleagues that, while I would be happy to consider all new ideas, we had to maintain understanding that the new ideas were not and could not become Spotlights of the strategic plan, for those had been determined; and that the Spotlights will remain our top priorities during the duration of the plan. This made communication of some decisions easier, for it brought order to the institution's prioritization.

A second situation is simply one in which a colleague's new initiative is well presented, without being claimed to be part of the plan, and is not affordable given available resources. The requesting colleague may relate the merits of their idea to those of the strategic plan, making a case that the new idea is as good as or better than those of the plan. In this case, the leader is wise to understand exactly what is being lost by not being able to fund the new idea, and communicate that understanding appropriately. But the leader must also indicate that many ideas were vetted, with only a small number selected, during the planning process, and that, following conclusion of the current plan, a cycle of consideration will commence again. This establishes a place for excellent ideas that one cannot afford to implement right away—in many cases, I could advise that a given colleague keep an idea brewing until the next strategic planning process, and perhaps even provide some small funding to facilitate that. Faculty understood this reasoning and, while in some cases were disappointed, they accepted it.

On occasion, this approach can pay off in surprising ways. For example, a select group of faculty, while implementation of one university's strategic plan was active, sought to create a formal program in peace and justice. Because this was not part of the university's plan, the dean of arts and sciences was not able to provide sufficient funding to realize it. The dean, however, was able to provide funding for conference attendance and meetings that kept exploration of the idea active. Recently, a donor approached the university seeking to fund a peace and justice initiative. Because of the dean's encouragement and past provision of skeletal funding, despite not being able to support the formal development of the program internally, the institution was ready to meet the donor's generosity when the donor kindly offered a major gift to found the program. Of course, the gift also required resiliency from the advancement office because the office had resolved to focus only on the strategic plan, hence the initiative was not specifically part of the university's comprehensive campaign.

When working diligently on the many dimensions of a plan's initiatives as a leader, one can easily forget that members of an organizational community typically have awareness of a relatively small subset of the plan or engage in limited activities associated with the plan. In some cases, re-emphasis on the plan by other leaders within the organization's hierarchy may not occur, so some colleagues may be working on elements of the plan without being specifically aware they are doing so. I have learned during discussions with colleagues that many, if not most, of them have not had exposure to the complete spectrum of efforts involved in a given institution's active plan. With this in mind, when I have to explain why a given new idea cannot supplant one of the current plan, I have learned to share data concerning efforts that are being put into the many

current initiatives of the plan (e.g., the number of fundraising personnel dedicated to them). Most colleagues have found these explanations compelling.

*Action Item/Cautious Tale 15: Recognize That Implementation Takes Person-Time.*

University leaders involved with overseeing strategic plans must always be aware of the planning, effort, and labor associated with the plans' implementation. At one institution, during many periods simultaneous with implementation of our plan, new ideas from various administrative quarters were offered or demanded that were not part of the plan. While we must be certain to accept that new demands on our institutions will at times necessarily require new actions, we must also be vigilant that commitments associated with a strategic plan typically ask many members of a campus community to stretch beyond their customary responsibilities. New ideas piled into the mix can compromise execution of the plan if leaders are not aware of the constellation of efforts associated with the plan. Given the complexities of day-to-day academic life, this awareness can be hard to maintain at times.

*Action Item Cautious Tale 16: Assure New Board Members And Personnel Are Reminded Of Plan.*

As noted in the discussion of one institution's evolving fiscal priorities, above, we must realize that the training of new personnel, including at the trustee level, must include all aspects of a given plan. Reminders associated with a plan's goals must persist, if focus on the plan is to be maintained. Even when the institution assures that this takes place, one can never expect true "ownership" of a given initiative that new personnel, including board members, have not helped create. New colleagues typically seek to forge new initiatives; leadership must be prepared to broker these while remaining with the course associated with a given plan. One must also realize and communicate that, as priorities change, because resources are finite, adding a new major initiative can diminish the capacity to accomplish an important initiative of the strategic plan.

## FINISHING, STRETCHING, RE-ENERGIZING: CLOSING THE PLAN AND RE-GEARING

Sometimes, the termination of a strategic plan can be as much as an art as the creation of one. Plans can linger well beyond their useful lives, and ideas from one plan, unrealized, can drift across planning "oceans" into subsequent plans without the scrutiny that newer ideas typically receive in the planning process. These considerations merit several Action Items and Cautious Tales, most of which are strongly related to the ideas presented above.

*Action Item 17: Always Include The Plan's Duration Dates With Its Title.*

We have discussed above many Action Items that rely strongly on the implementation time line of a strategic plan. These include fundraising campaigns, handling of new ideation that takes place in concert with plan implementation, and so on. With this in mind, all members of a given organization must remain aware of the plan's time line and where the organization is within that interval.

The institution cited in Action Item 9 was wise to include its plan's duration and dates in all presentations associated with it. This was important for reminders related to fundraising efforts; for personnel involved in the plan's continuing execution; and for those incubating new ideas for a coming plan.

Of course, though a good strategic plan should and typically does have a published intended termination date, one should always be aware that environmental circumstances may indeed call for an eventual adjustment of that date. In one university's case, necessary delays pushed the termination date back (forward in time) by at least two years. As described in Action Item 12, above, the plan was created, announced, and implemented with the capacity for such changes honored.

*Action Item/Cautious Tale 18: Cut The Cable While The Plan Still Feels Relatively Fresh.*

As noted above, plans can become “old and dry.” Once this happens, the zeal associated with a given plan can be replaced by malaise. One can sense such developments; at one institution, the most recent plan’s excitement is has started to subside; in part, this is so because so many members of the current campus community, at all levels, are new to the university. They have brought new ideas to the mix, while the people who forged the current strategic plan have accomplished many of theirs. One must be vigilant in sensing when a given plan’s excitement has ebbed. Unless an active fundraising campaign is underway, one is better off moving toward a new plan at an earlier stage, rather than waiting for a given plan, and zeal associated with it, to stall.

*Action Item 19: Do Not Be Compelled To Inject Failed Initiatives Into The Next Plan.*

Even though this should be on a strategic planner’s top-five list of “do-not’s,” time and again strategic planners begin their process by gathering all of the previous plan’s failed initiatives and injecting them into the new plan. In doing this, planners immediately associate what should be new, fresh ambitions with items that have been in the mix for plenty of time, yet have not been accomplished. Even when such failed initiatives are important, they inevitably can be accompanied by negative feelings, including those shared by persons charged with the initiatives who did not succeed, along with a sense that the institution is seeking to accomplish something it cannot. Inclusion of failed initiatives also keeps stories associated with decisions-gone-wrong alive and abuzz. Not a good basis for a new plan!

One recent university plan was rife with new initiatives. Even where some were retained from the previous plan (e.g., diversity), they were reinvigorated with new perspectives (e.g., moving from proportional inclusion (measures of minority presence) to improvement of institutional quality (through expanded diversity). This made for a lively plan, along with lively conversations and marketing associated with it.

*Action Item 20: Use What Was Denied, As Not Being Part Of Plan, As Input Into The Next Plan’s Idea Mix.*

As noted above in Action Item/Cautionary Tale 14, members of an academic community can produce valuable new ideas while a given strategic plan is being executed, but many of these ideas are not able to receive prioritization. Because such ideas are good and already have champions, they make terrific starters for elements—and even, expanded, themes—of an exciting new plan.

## CONCLUSION: SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS AND CAUTIONARY TALES

We conclude with a summary of Action Items and Cautionary Tales discussed in this paper, here listed simply as “Actions.” We rephrase some of the items in order to make them, when not attached to their accompanying text, more portable, and we collect them into the categories of Voices, Vision, Vitality, and Vista.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, to those engaged in or about to engage in planning: all best wishes!

### *Voices:*

Action 1: Consult with everybody in sight.

Action 2: Engage a qualified consultant.

Action 3: Know that perceived smaller voices may bring your greatest gifts.

Action 4: Determine and communicate roles, responsibilities, and authorities associated with the plan.

### *Vision:*

Action 5: Establish and communicate an audacious, unifying vision for the plan.

Action 6: “Long live the plan!?” No: *Short-life* the plan!

Action 7: Create a small number of tight *Spotlight Initiatives* that drive toward your audacious, uniform vision; relegate ongoing (including ambitious) activities to appendices or companion documents.

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<sup>6</sup> The author thanks Kashlak (2014) for suggesting these categories.

Action 8: Sew parallel strategic streams into your plan's Spotlights.

Action 9: Set a time line for your plan, but announce and assure that members of your community anticipate annual revisions of it.

Action 10: Assure that strategic items that are part of your plan, but not listed as plan spotlights, remain visible and appropriately prioritized, especially in the plan's later years.

Action 11: Maintain emphasis on your plan's audacious, uniform vision for the plan's entire duration.

#### *Vivacity:*

Action 12: Tie your plan to appropriate budgeting, allocation, and annual review processes.

Action 13: Assure that development personnel are involved in your planning process; let the plan drive development operations and campaigns.

Action 14: Keep the spotlights focused: avoid "initiative creep" into your plan's mix of goals and its encompassing vision.

Action 15: Recognize that implementation of your plan takes person-time; avoid adding new "to-dos" to plan implementers' slate of duties.

Action 16: Assure new board members and organizational personnel are aware of and frequently reminded of your plan and its goals.

Action 17: Always include your plan's duration dates with its title.

Action 18: Do not allow zeal associated with your plan to be replaced by malaise: cut the cable while the plan still feels relatively fresh.

#### *Vista:*

Action 19: Do not be compelled to inject the failed initiatives of yesterday's plan into your new plan.

Action 20: Use valuable ideas that could not be realized while your plan is being implemented as input into the next plan's mix of fresh ideas.

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## ORGANIZATION

The Society was founded December 10, 1970 in Washington, DC. Over 50 local, state, national, and international planners attended the first organizational meeting.

Since then its continued growth demonstrates the need for a professions organization with educational planning as its exclusive concern.

## PURPOSE

The International Society for Educational Planning was established to foster the professional knowledge and interests of educational planners. Through conferences and publications, the society promotes the interchange of ideas within the planning community. The membership includes persons from the ranks of governmental agencies, school-based practitioners, and higher education.

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY

Membership in the society is open to any person active or interested in educational planning and the purposes of the Society. To join the Society or renew a membership please complete and submit the enclosed form.

Please forward check/money order/PO to:

ISEP

Dr. Glen I. Earthman, Secretary/Treasurer

2903 Ashlawn Drive

Blacksburg, VA 24060-8101

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