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*THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN PLANNING:
A FRANK AND CANDID ANALYSIS OF THE
REALITIES OF PLANNING IN THE
PUBLIC SECTOR*

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INTRODUCTION

In a syndicated article by Tom Peters (1992), published in Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, Tom Peters quotes Oliver Cromwell as saying, "No one rises so high as he who knows not whither he is going." Peters goes on to say that he believes that personal success, and, by extension, business success by business leaders, is "about 99% passion, and 1% plan. Moreover, the passion must be for the present."

Peters is half right. But he's also half wrong. The passion must be present, but this article will argue that the passion must be combined with a long-term vision.

This article will not present yet another comprehensive approach to library planning. There are enough of those out there already. Rather, this article will present elements that leaders must consider that are critical to any successful planning process and contribute to success. This is not a primer on how to plan, but more what to include in any successful planning process and why it is important.

CHANGE

But first a word about change. Jerry McCarthy, a computer consultant in Denver, Colorado, says, "The only person who welcomes change is a wet baby." An underlying element of leadership, particularly in the area of planning, is to help people consider, even welcome, how an organization might change. People are frightened by planning efforts. They see them as a potential threat to their own piece of the organization. "What if my job isn't a priority after the planning process is complete? Will my little turf in the library continue to receive support?" It feels safer to resist the change, resist the planning effort, and continue what John

Gardner (1987, p. 15) calls "systemic stagnation." This means that both staff and leaders are satisfied with things as they are. Gardner goes on to say that organizations that need change show clear evidence that it is needed. But it is easier to ignore the warning signs. What is needed are leaders who can "bestir" themselves, and they will be credited with "an uncanny gift of prophesy."

It is role of the leader to confront change, propose change, empower people to suggest change, soften the fear of change, and manage those whose fear paralyzes them. The elements described below can assist these efforts.

TYPES OF PLANNING PROCESSES

There are five types of planning process that I want to briefly mention, showing the advantages and disadvantages of each:

1. traditional long-range planning,
2. strategic long-range planning,
3. annual planning,
4. outcome/standards planning, and
5. total quality management planning.

Comprehensive Long-Range Planning

Comprehensive long-range planning is the oldest planning model, and the one most often used. The original *A Planning Process for Public Libraries* (Palmour, Bellassai, and De Wath, 1980) and the revised *Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries* (McClure, Owen, Zweizig, Lynch, and Van House, 1987) attempt to assist public libraries in a comprehensive planning process. Two advantages of this approach are that there are lots of guides to help a library through the process, and it can include the interests and activities of all library staff. It is the least threatening of all the planning processes to library staff.

The biggest problem with traditional, comprehensive long-range planning is the "comprehensive" part of it. The second biggest problem is that the plans reflect so much compromise and fuzzy thinking that they become weighty doorstops rather than guides to actual activity.

Comprehensive long-range planning is particularly liked by staff who feel they will be left out of a strategic planning process. Comprehensive long-range planning most often takes what a library is currently doing, projects it doing the same thing only a little more, includes all current activities of the library reconfigured slightly differently, and library life

goes on the same as before. In *Close to Power*, William Lucy (1988) says, "those who call themselves planners establish psychological limits for themselves by focussing on the preparation of plans as their goal rather than trying to achieve results in which the plans are an important stage" (p. 27).

Comprehensive long-range planning typically starts with the articulation of a mission, data collection about the community and the library, and definition of goals with objectives under them. The full implementation of the plan with a detailed action plan and the annual and long-term evaluation are often slighted.

Comprehensive planning too often gets bogged down in definitions. What's a mission, vision, purpose, goal, objective, activity, strategy? Planning committees have been known to argue endlessly over which is measurable—the goal or the objective.

Strategic Long-Range Planning

Lucy (1988) describes the difference between strategic planning and more traditional planning as "its emphasis on (1) action, (2) consideration of a broad and diverse set of stakeholders, (3) attention to external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses, and (4) attention to actual or potential competitors" (p. 49).

Strategic planning cures some of the ills of comprehensive planning in that the focus is on what the library strategically needs to do to improve its position or targets special, high priority needs. As the major defect of comprehensive long-range planning is that too much is included, the major defect of strategic planning is that in concentrating on a few key areas, other parts of library operation are excluded. This can give the impression that these areas are less important, creating anxiety among the staff.

An alternative approach is to establish priorities and require all staff to plug their activities into these priorities. For example, in the Colorado Department of Education, approximately two-thirds of the activity is related to pre k-12 grade education and one-third is related to libraries and adult literacy. Yet the department's priorities have been in the pre k-12 arena. The mailroom clerks at the Colorado Talking Book Library, who serve primarily home-bound senior citizens, find it difficult to fit their activities into priorities that focus on student achievement and parent involvement in education.

Annual Planning

Annual planning is usually budget and deadline driven. The city manager or university administrator asks for a budget by a specific date. You and your board or staff advisors scramble to determine how much to ask for. You think strategically about what it really costs to do something; how to invoke a crisis atmosphere with the funders about how terrible the situation will be if you are not given an increase; how to keep from specifically saying what will happen because you don't want to scare the staff to death; and how much more to ask for than you really need in order to still get a little increase once they cut you back.

Annual planning should be done in the context of a long-range or strategic plan.

Outcome/Standards Based Planning

Outcome or standards based planning is the latest approach to planning, currently used primarily in education. In this approach, desired outcomes are first identified or standards are set. Planning is tied to the best way to reach the outcome or standard. This approach has the advantage of being focused on a desired future. If the library is in the position of setting for itself the desired outcome or standard to be reached, this type of planning can be very successful. If the outcomes are customer/student based and the standards broad enough, most library staff can feel their activities can fit into the articulated outcomes.

The disadvantage of outcomes/standards planning is the difficulty of articulating the outcomes or standards. Even more problematic is when the parent institution sets the outcomes or standards, and they may or may not relate to the library activity. In this arena, all the elements indicated below are particularly critical.

Total Quality Management Planning

Another planning method currently popular is planning in the context of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM uses customer input, benchmarks, and cross-level staff teams to establish organizational priorities and activities. While TQM does involve staff in a meaningful way, I believe that it also presents problems for the exercise of leadership. Often, leadership in planning involves predicting what the public will want in the future. Asking the public as part of the TQM process can result in an uninformed public asking for what they already have. Would libraries ever have become automated if the TQM process had asked the public what they wanted in card catalogs?

All of these models can break down in the face of real and concrete decisions that must be made in order for the library to thrive, maybe even survive, in today's fiscal and competitive environment.

I've come to believe that it doesn't really matter which of the models above you choose or are forced to use. What is critical is that the planning leader, personally, keep the six elements below in mind in whatever planning process is used.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PLAN

The principles below were selected from many sources. Lucy (1988) in *Close to Power*, Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) in *Changing the Essence*, Belasco (1990) in *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*, Covey (1990) in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and Kouzes and Posner (1988) in *The Leadership Challenge*, all use the same basic elements, although sometimes they are combined in different ways or given different names.

But the principles really come from my own experience in planning, ten years in facilitating libraries that are engaging in long-range planning, and in leading two state library organizations. The principles are

1. Determine a vision
2. Communicate the vision to others
3. Flexible persistence
4. Collaboration/infiltration
5. Staff involvement
6. Assessment and evaluation

Determine a Vision

Kouzes and Posner (1988) write, "Every organization, every social movement begins with a dream. The dream or vision is the force that invents the future. Leaders spend considerable effort gazing across the horizon of time, imagining what it will be like when they have arrived at their final destinations" (p. 9).

This is the first and most crucial step. A leader MUST determine the direction he or she wants to take the organization. The clearer the end result is presented, the more likely that the vision can be attained. But it is critical that only the end be envisioned as this process starts. Envisioning the means to the end can lead to early failure. One failure of a path to a vision does not mean the vision fails, only that another path must be developed.

The difficult part of this step is actually articulating the vision. It must come from the gut first and not from the head. Of all the possible visions of the future, what is it that you want the library to be? The vision can be for the library as a whole or for individual parts of it. Each unit in the library can have its own separate vision of the future that are then brought together through a planning process.

Stephen Covey (1990) in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* calls it "beginning with the end in mind." This is based on the principle that "all things are created twice. There's a mental or first creation and a second or physical creation to all things" (p. 99).

In a recent tour of a winery in Napa Valley, the winemaker described his process for making a good wine. First he envisioned what the wine would taste like and then he tried to put together grapes to get that taste. He did not combine grapes and choose the best combination to sell. First he envisioned the wine in his mouth, in his nose, with all of his senses. With that vision, he had many possibilities to bring it about.

In karate, even young children, novices in the sport, can break boards. The technique is simple. They look below the board at where they want their hand to be. The board then becomes something their hand simply passes through in order to get to where they want their hand to be. More proficient karate students can break an unbelievable number of boards using this same technique. With a clear vision in mind, obstacles become insignificant barriers to reaching the desired future.

One major issue in creating a vision is who creates it. The vision can come from anywhere, but the leader must, first and foremost, understand, support, internalize, commit to, embrace the vision as his or her own. Sometimes, in the best of circumstances, the leader has a visionary team that can participate in the visioning process. But even without this supportive team, the leader can create and communicate a vision.

Communicate the Vision

Public library guru Charlie Robinson from the Baltimore County Public Library, has what I believe to be the best definition of leadership: The essence of leadership is the communication of commitment.

Creating the vision is the commitment element of Charlie's definition. But the second key element is the communication of that commitment. This is selling your vision to others.

Beginning with a clear vision doesn't necessarily mean that it is set in concrete. Even clear visions can be improved as they are communicated

and discussed. A good leader will flesh out the vision as a result of this communication and discussion.

A major component of leadership is followers. No one can lead without someone else going in the same direction. Communicating the vision is what produces not only followers, but passionate followers committed to the same vision and direction.

Research (Kouzes & Posner, 1988, p. 16) on what people want from their leaders reveals three primary characteristics: forward looking, inspiring, and honest. People want to believe that their leaders know where they are going (and taking the organization), and that they are honest/credible in communicating about that direction. People must have confidence that they, personally, can affect the future. That confidence in themselves comes from confidence in their leader to which they look for guidance and inspiration. Confidence in themselves and the leader, as Gardner (1987) puts it, "greatly increases the likelihood of sustained, highly motivated effort" (p. 13). The research done by Kouzes and Posner (1988) reveals that, "Credibility of action is the single most significant determinant of whether a leader will be followed over time" (p. xvii).

Communicating a vision combined with belief in the credibility of the leader has a powerful positive effect on the entire organization. Kouzes and Posner (1988) find in their research that "when leaders clearly articulated their vision for the organization, people reported significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, esprit de corps, clarity of direction, pride, and productivity. It is quite evident that clearly articulated visions make a difference" (pp. 92-93).

Visions must be communicated over and over. They must permeate the very fabric of an organization. Staff may doubt the commitment of a leader to create a future for the library and lead the library toward that future. Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) add, "People also forget, and sometimes they do not hear what they have been told. Messages that are very familiar to top management must be repeated and repeated, more than top management would believe to be necessary" (p. 85).

The best way to communicate a vision is . . . just start talking about it, over and over, adjusting it as input comes, making it clearer each time, always communicating your commitment.

Flexible Persistence

Leaders seeking to implement a vision must be persistent in moving toward the vision but flexible in the methods chosen. The persistence requires, purely and simply, energy. If leaders don't have the energy and excitement about the vision, staff will not have the energy either.

Having the vision, the end result, clearly in mind allows a library leader to seek numerous paths to attain the vision. This is the primary reason why visions should not start with a single path to attainment. If there is a clear vision, the failure of one path creates a mere pause until another path is found.

When we created the Access Colorado Library and Information Network (ACLIN), we began with one clear vision: free library and citizen access to the maximum number of library resources in Colorado, regardless of where a person lives in the state. The vision was remarkably easy to articulate, but the path toward it changed constantly over the three years it took to get the money to bring it to fruition. Three different approaches to getting the phone lines installed and access provided failed until the final successful method was developed. But the vision stayed clear the entire time.

Keeping the vision in mind while exploring different paths to the ultimate fruition produces a way of thinking that is both inspiring to staff and productive in the outcome. Sandy Cooper, State Librarian in North Carolina, calls this “informed opportunism.” It is possible to take advantage of opportunities that come along if the ultimate result is clearly defined.

Lucy (1988) calls it “strategic thinking,” and describes it this way: “Strategic thinking helps to identify resources, calculate how to combine these resources in timely and effective combinations, and how to use them at opportune moments to achieve results” (p. 4).

Most helpful, the existence of a vision gives a leader a context for planning activities, choosing courses of action, and making informed decisions. Will a choice to be made bring one closer to the vision or not?

Collaboration (Infiltration)

Collaboration is meaningful cooperation with other organizations to accomplish one’s goals. Infiltration is collaboration with stakeholders who have an effect on your organization’s future.

Partners are valuable contributors to the achievement of a vision. Part of “informed opportunism” is identifying those who can help bring about the desired results.

Steven Covey (1990) in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, advocates what he calls “the third alternative” (p. 207). It’s a step beyond seeking a win/win solution. The third alternative is finding a way to approach a problem that is better and more satisfying than either of the

parties involved could develop alone. You not only “win,” but get more than you originally even conceived possible. That’s the best kind of collaboration that leads to the “third alternative.”

And then there’s infiltration. Almost all libraries are part of some larger governmental structure upon which they depend for survival. Cultivating that relationship in a positive way is essential and requires constant vigilance. Implementing the library’s vision in the context of a parent organization that may or may not share the same vision is a challenge. Infiltrating the organization allows you to sell your vision inside the organization and/or relate your vision to the vision of the parent organization.

Joey Rodger, Executive Director of the Urban Libraries Council, quotes a city council member as saying that there are four things that assist success in a bureaucratic structure: (1) keep problems in-house, (2) win a prize every once in a while, (3) be a partner, don’t ask for what’s unrealistic, and (4) be a part of the solution to the problem. He concluded by saying it’s harder to un-fund a partner than someone with their hand out.

Stakeholders can begin as supporters of a vision or detractors. Leaders ignore negative stakeholders at their own future peril.

When we attempted to initiate a statewide borrowers card in Colorado, without compensation to net lenders, we knew we had to obtain two kinds of cooperation. First, the majority of the libraries had to support the concept, and, second, those key stakeholder libraries that opposed the idea had to be converted. We put the negative stakeholders on the planning committee and asked them to help design a program that would address all of their concerns. They did, and the program was implemented on July 1, 1992.

Lucy (1988, p. 47) suggests concepts and processes to consider in making collaborative efforts successful. It is important to build coalitions before key decisions are made so that there is adequate time to seek the best solution incorporating everyone’s needs. Seek agreement on low-controversy policy alternatives so that there is a history of cooperation, even friendship, when the more controversial issues are discussed. Look at the key concerns and inclinations of key decision-makers. Who influences the influential? Do policymakers respond to citizens, faculty/students, other stakeholders? From how many of them can you get support?

Credibility is also a key element in collaboration (Lucy, 1988, p. 170). To be effective, you must be credible. Others must believe that your

participation in decisions is appropriate. "Legitimacy gets you in the door and a seat at the table. . . . Credibility comes from how you handle yourself at the table." To be a partner at the table means you have to accept the pain and responsibility for making hard choices. Balancing the needs and vision of the library with the needs and vision of the parent or collaborative organizations provides ample challenge to create Covey's third alternative.

Involving Staff

No leader achieves results alone. Transforming a vision into reality requires the efforts of a whole team. Part of leadership is inspiring that team effort and empowering staff to participate in the effort in a meaningful and appropriate way.

Interaction Associates (1993), a California training firm focusing on group dynamics, suggests five levels of involvement in organizational decision-making (pp. 3-26). The five levels of involvement are directly related to the level of ownership of the decision.

Level 1: Decide and announce—the supervisor makes up his or her mind and announces a decision. No involvement of staff and no level of ownership.

Level 2: Gather input from individuals and decide—this can produce some level of ownership, at least if some of the individuals recognize their own ideas in the final decision made.

Level 3: Gather input from a group and decide—the advantage of this level, both for the staff and for the supervisor, is that ideas have the benefit of discussion in a group situation where people can build on other ideas. It produces a higher level of ownership if the group's input is reflected in the decision finally made.

Level 4: Consensus—the supervisor is a participant in the group decision-making and the group's decision, agreed to by all, is the final decision made. This produces a high level of ownership by all who are involved. It works best if a back-up method of decision-making is designated from the very beginning—if consensus cannot be reached, the supervisor decides based on the discussion. It also has the extreme advantage that employees know that in order to have their position prevail, they must be willing to listen, accept, and possibly compromise with others. Used to the best advantage, the solution is Covey's "third alternative."

Level 5: Delegate with constraints—the supervisor delegates a decision to a group of staff with clear constraints (I prefer to call them parameters) in which the staff is to work. It relieves the supervisor from the decision-making process (once the parameters are given) and produces the highest level of staff ownership in a decision.

A leader working to communicate and implement a vision would most likely use the higher involvement/ownership levels. These levels work to implement a vision in other ways as well:

1. They tend to produce the most innovative approaches because more creative minds are involved.
2. People feel empowered to act and give their full commitment to the vision.
3. When one path fails, there is a cadre of people who understand the vision and can find new approaches.
4. Not only staff but other stakeholders can participate in the discussion, planning, and decision-making process.
5. It allows those who do something best to exercise their skills.
6. It produces very satisfied staff and excellent decisions.

Leaders keep the big picture in mind and stay out of the little stuff. Leader involvement in details of any project can stifle staff creativity involvement. When a leader tells staff what to do, the responsibility for any action falls on the leader's shoulders.

The leader's decision about involving staff is a controversial one. Some advocate less sharing of decision-making and more individual decisiveness. For example, Herb White (1987) says:

But leadership skills are not the same as management skills, and primarily they are instinctive although they can be refined. The confusion becomes most apparent when it is suggested that leaders seek consensus and learn to compromise. The search for consensus is the very opposite of what they do, and if they agree to compromise it is part of a pragmatic process for yielding a little bit now in order to win a lot later. (pp. 68-69)

In the same vein, John Berry (1993) quotes K. Wayne Smith, OCLC CEO, saying, "due process sometimes outlasts the window of opportunity" (p. 28).

This is why I like the Interaction Associates approach. Their entire decision-making process makes it clear that the ultimate decision is ALWAYS in the hands of the organization leader. It is his or her decision about what level of decision-making to delegate. They do make the point, however, that more minds and voices sometimes make better decisions.

A leader is foolhardy who subdues his or her instincts about a *right* decision in honor of a process. By the same token, a leader who only listens to his/her own voice, all the time, runs the real risk of making bad or at least nonproductive decisions. Gardner (1987) urges leaders to “keep a measure of diversity and dissent in the system. Dissent isn’t comfortable, but generally it is simply the proposing of alternatives—and a system that isn’t continuously examining alternatives is not likely to evolve creatively” (p. 15).

What is needed is the balance, best suggested by Covey’s third alternative. Any staff-community-stakeholder involvement should result in not only better, but “quantum leap” better, decisions. Kouzes and Posner’s (1988, p. 38) research shows that 50% of the time, the best ideas that made a project successful did not come for the leader him or herself but rather from the leader’s supervisor or the leader’s staff. It was the ability of the leader to recognize a good idea and work with staff to run with it that contributed to the success.

This relates closely to the key element of flexible persistence, the continual search to identify alternative methods to reach an identified mission.

Assessment and Evaluation

Finally, the sixth key element is that of assessment and evaluation. I’m using these terms with the following definitions. Assessment is the process of measuring a library’s success in achieving its vision, goals, objectives, however they are named. Evaluation is a body of critical decisions, made as a result of the assessment, that lead toward new efforts and directions.

The literature variously describes three kinds of assessment:

1. Input assessment measures what goes into making something happen in the library (number of programs planned or books purchased).
2. Output assessment measures what the library produces with those inputs (number of people who attend programs or borrow books).
3. Outcome assessment measures the impact of the library’s activities on those it is serving (what impact did program attendance or a book checked out have on people’s lives).

Obviously, it is easier to collect data about inputs and outputs than outcomes. In fact, one line of thought says that it is impossible to collect outcome or impact data because the library is seldom the only contribu-

tor to that impact. In addition, the only possible way to measure impact is to ask the library user directly—clearly the most difficult and expensive way to collect data.

One excellent example comes from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* where a letter to the editor reported a study done in the Rochester, New York, area (Joynt, Marshall, & McClure, 1991). Threatened with severe budget cuts because the New York Department of Health saw no “useful linkage” between the need for a hospital to maintain a medical library and its effect on patient care, the medical library community, in response to that assertion, asked doctors to request some information from their hospital library related to a current clinical case and to evaluate its impact on the care of their patients. The doctors reported changes in the following specific aspects of care as a result of the materials they received: diagnosis (29%); choice of tests (51%); choice of drugs (45%); reduced length of hospital stay (19%); change in advice given to the patient (72%); avoided hospital admission (12%); avoided hospital acquired infection (8%); avoided surgery (21%); avoided additional tests or procedures (49%); and *avoided mortality (19%)* [emphasis added].

Now that’s impact. Avoided mortality! Libraries need to think more creatively about how to measure the value of what they do for their users.

Lucy (1988, p. 22) devotes considerable space to suggestions for collecting pertinent information that will influence decision-makers. He says to focus on the information that would help lead to decisions which must be made or which might be made. Gather information that is central to the accepted or competing theories. Gather information that will help decide among alternatives. Information is gathered too often which is not pertinent to decisions which are possible or probable. Information should not be gathered simply because having some information makes analysis feel better. The central question is how might it contribute to arriving at a decision?

At the Colorado State Library, Keith Lance (1993) has developed an evaluative process which he calls CITE (Criteria for Information Transfer Evaluation). It is designed specifically to look at the relationship between inputs, outputs, and outcomes. As we try to prove to the legislature the value of what we do, we need to assess our activity in a different way and move as far as possible toward assessing the impact of what we do. We hope to prove that more inputs has a direct impact on outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have looked at the advantages and disadvantages of five planning processes. Libraries choose or are required to use variations of

these five processes. The position I am emphasizing is that, regardless of the planning process used, there are six key elements essential to the success of any plan.

I want to close with a thought from Beckhard. He devotes a full chapter to "Resolving the Leader's Personal Dilemmas." Beckhard (1988, pp. 53-54) makes the point that much of the process of visioning, communicating, and motivating staff emanates from the personal values of the leader and that leaders must balance their own values with the needs of the organization. He raises a number of questions/issues:

1. How much will the leader's behavior be driven by personal values, beliefs and priorities, and the need to stimulate and develop the best leadership behavior in staff?
2. What managerial roles does the leader wish to play: manager- director, court of appeal, stimulator-facilitator, consultant?
3. How does the leader wish to be perceived: visionary, entrepreneur, leader/manager, solid business executive?
4. Whose perceptions matter: key administrators, colleagues and subordinates, competitors, the media?
5. What aspects should the leader personally manage?
6. How does the leader integrate business and personal aspects of life?

I will let Beckhard (1988) have the final word. He emphasizes:

the absolute essentiality of a fundamental change effort being vision-driven. The vision of the end state is a statement of leadership's priorities and commitments. It is the expression of the context, within which goals must be set, activities determined, and commitment secured.
(p. 35)

The six key elements of creating, communicating, and persistently pursuing a vision, and then forming coalitions, motivating staff, and assessing the process and outcomes are critical not only to business-library relationships but to community and personal relationships as well.

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