

# **Strategic Planning in the University**

Kathleen A. Paris, Ph.D., Consultant  
Office of Quality Improvement  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

---

November, 2003  
Copyright © 2003 University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents

## **What is Strategic Planning?**

Strategic planning is a means of establishing major directions for the university, college/school or department. Through strategic planning, resources are concentrated in a limited number of major directions in order to maximize benefits to stakeholders--those we exist to serve and who are affected by the choices we make. In higher education, those stakeholders include students, employers of graduates, funding agencies, and society, as well as internal stakeholders such as faculty and staff. Strategic planning is a structured approach to anticipating the future and "exploiting the inevitable." The strategic plan should chart the broad course for the entire institution for the next five years. It is a process for ensuring that the budget dollars follow the plan rather than vice versa. Strategic planning is not just a plan for growth and expansion. A strategic plan can and often does guide retrenchment and reallocation.

McConkey (1981) said that the essence of strategy is differentiation. What makes this university or college or department different from any other? Educational institutions, like other service organizations, can differentiate themselves based on types of programs, delivery systems, student clientele, location, and the like. Similarly, a department or administrative unit involved in strategic planning will identify its unique niche in the larger university community and focus its resources on a limited number of strategic efforts, abandoning activities that could be, should be, or are being done by others.

## **Why Is Strategic Planning Essential?**

Formalized strategic planning grew out of budget exercises in the America of the 1950s and spread rapidly. By the mid-1960s and throughout the 70s, strategic planning (in many forms) was occurring in most large corporations (Mintzberg, 1994). Even the federal government used a Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS) during this time.

Public and nonprofit organizations recognized the usefulness of strategy formulation during the 1980s, when the notion of marketing for public and non-profit organizations gained prominence. Most well-known models of public and nonprofit strategic planning have their roots in the Harvard policy model developed at the Harvard Business School (Bryson, 1988). The systematic analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is a primary strength of the Harvard model and is a step in the strategic planning model used at UW-Madison (Figure 1.1). Given its thirty-some years of practice in this country, why is strategic planning essential now?

These are times of rapid change. Will Rogers said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." No university or college or department can remain static for long. Neither can an institution survive for long with knee-jerk responses to change. Strategic planning should minimize crisis-mode decision-making.

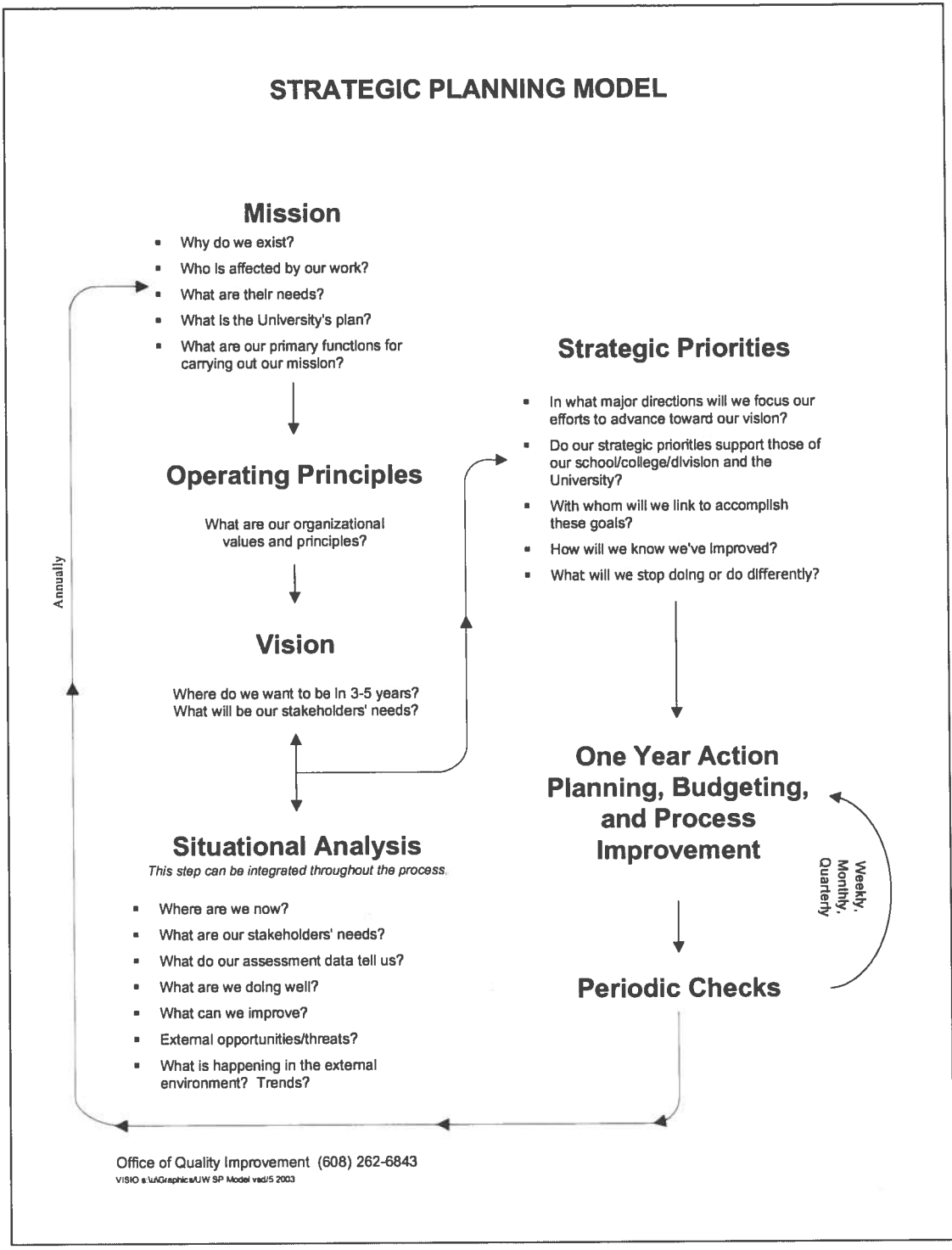


Figure 1.1 Strategic Planning Model

These are times of social and cultural complexity. One small group at the top cannot know the needs of students, employers and other stakeholder without their input. It is also difficult for one small internal group to know all that is occurring in the external environment that will have an impact, positive or negative, on the university or college.

There are times of interdependence. Bryson (1988) provides three examples of formerly distinct arenas that are now very much interconnected: domestic and international: public, private and nonprofit; and educational and economic policies. The blurring of these distinctions means that although many organizations and institutions are involved, no one is fully in charge. This increased environmental ambiguity requires educational institutions and other public entities to think and act strategically as never before (Bryson, 1988).

Traditional financial resources for the support of higher education are not likely to increase. Cut-backs are the norm in educational financing. Yet demands for services continue to expand. Strategic planning gives the university, the college, the department, and the administrative unit the opportunity to chart its own course and to focus its own future. Jurinksi (1993) calls strategic planning an intellectual exercise. As such, the process is uniquely suited to higher education.

Keller (1983) speaks of conscious academic strategy as an appropriate response to turbulence.

...The dogma of colleges as amiable, anarchic, self-correcting collectives of scholars with a small contingent of dignified caretakers at the unavoidable business edge is crumbling. A new era of conscious academic strategy is being born. The modern college and university scene is one that is no longer so fiercely disdainful of sound economics and financial planning or so derisive of strategic management. Professors and campus administrators are now uniting to design plans, programs, priorities, and expenditures in order to insure their futures and to keep American higher education among the world's best. (pp. viii-ix)

### **Strategic v. Long-Range Planning**

It is sometimes thought that strategic planning is just another buzz word for long-range planning. There are major differences between strategic planning

and garden variety long-range planning. First, strategic planning is much more sensitive to the external environment than long-range planning. Traditionally, long-range planning was inwardly focused. The goals and objectives were formulated with minimal attention to the larger system in which the institution functioned.

Traditional long-range planning could be conducted with minimal involvement of stakeholders, those affected by the plan. Strategic planning, particularly the model in Figure 1.1 which has been used in a variety of departments, offices, and colleges on the UW-Madison campus, relies on information from internal and external stakeholders regarding their needs, expectations and requirements as the foundation for planning.

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

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

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

Keller (1983) says that strategic planning places the fate of the institution above all else.

Strategic planning places the long-term vitality and excellence of the college or university first. It cares about traditions, faculty salaries, and programs in Greek, agriculture, and astrophysics. But it cares about institutional survival more, so that there will be places for scholars of Greek, agriculture, and astrophysics to teach and do their research. Scholars cannot easily hang their shingle out like physicians or architects.... Professors still need to unite as a universitas. (p. 151)

## **Benefits of Strategic Planning**

Effective strategic planning can accrue many benefits to the organization. First, it enables the organization to be proactive and to actively shape its own destiny. Because the process requires attention to trends and external developments, an educational institution or department is less likely to be taken by surprise by a new problem or development.

Stakeholders--those affected by the organization--are involved in the planning process. Thus the institution or department receives valuable feedback both on successful efforts and on areas where improvements should be made.

Representatives from faculty, academic staff, and classified staff should be involved as each group brings a unique perspective to the process. This involvement throughout the process helps ensure that those who have major responsibilities to carry out the plan understand the plan and the reasons behind it. Being involved in the planning process can contribute greatly to employees' commitment to mutual goals and a sense of organizational unity.

Similarly, the active involvement of stakeholders in the planning process creates external advocacy for the organization. Employers, for example, are much more likely to support an educational initiative such as a new degree program or a revamped curriculum if they have a first-hand role in a well-designed planning process. Note that the term is "active involvement." External stakeholders have traditionally served in advisory capacities to the educational enterprise. Involvement in strategic planning is much more substantive than the advisory role. Their involvement essentially lays the groundwork for continuing support and participation by those stakeholders.

A major benefit of strategic planning in higher educational institutions is that it can lend stability to the organization in spite of increasingly frequent leadership changes. Simmons and Pohl (1994) found that from 1980 to 1994 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the average dean's tenure was five years. They further noted that the average length of leadership tenure was declining sharply with each year. Their observation was that

Strategic planning creates a broad decision-making group by actively involving middle and operational levels of management. By pushing decision-making down, a system for strategic planning can help the organization maintain a core purpose during times of changing leadership. (p. 2)

Simmons and Pohl (1994) also pointed out that a broadly-based participative strategic planning process can actually make the most of the frequent leadership changes by coupling a new leader's external perspective with a stable core internal group that is committed to mutual goals and a shared vision of a successful future.

### **The Dark Side of Strategic Planning**

The dark side of strategic planning is not so very dark, but it does have some inherent hazards. Jurinski (1993) says that strategic planning efforts that fail typically do so because the organization underestimated the required amount of time, effort and money from the start. The process takes time. It is difficult for any organization or group to go through a strategic planning process in less than two concentrated days in addition to shorter preparatory sessions and later meeting(s) to revise plans based on feedback. Figure 1.1 shows the steps in a strategic planning model which has been used at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. From the day the decision is made to create a strategic plan, several months are generally required to complete the process. (Most of this time is lead time for scheduling the major planning session.) Some planning efforts occur over many months and even years. This long time line is generally not advisable or necessary. People become exhausted by the process and the effort loses momentum.

A good planning process costs money. Bringing people together requires places to meet, facilitators, meals and refreshments, travel costs, audiovisual rentals, and the like.

Strategic planning can be risky in that deliberate decisions are made to focus or refocus the organization. This means that "something has to go" or at the very least, "something has to change." One of the hallmarks of strategic planning is fresh, bold approaches that break through barriers. Ideally, these new strategies propel the organization to its vision. In the worst case scenario, poorly considered strategic decisions can be disastrous. One purpose of having a broadly representative group of internal and external stakeholders involved is to help avoid organizational decisions that would be viewed retrospectively as errors.

## Elements of a Successful Strategic Planning Process

Five ingredients are essential for an effective strategic planning process--the right people, good data, preparation, a structured process, and adequate resources of time and dollars. Each of these five elements is revisited later.

- *People*  
Having the right people means that all the key stakeholders are represented in some way. Usually this is done through a representation system where each participant in the planning event is there representing a particular stakeholder group--students, business, faculty, classified staff, academic staff, affiliated agencies and the like. The responsibility of all participants is to take the preliminary planning results back to the group they represent to receive feedback. This feedback, both positive and negative, is then brought back to the group and used for revising the draft plans.
- *Data*  
One of the connections between strategic planning and continuous quality improvement is the reliance on data as the basis for decision-making. Data on stakeholder/customer needs and their evaluation of existing services are required for the planning process. The more hard data that are available to describe the current situation, the better the chances of a good plan. Strategic planning in the absence of reliable data can be dangerous. Yet, it is not unusual to find organizations planning for the future with little or no reliable information about the true state of affairs. Some organizations find, upon beginning a strategic planning process, that they must create a temporary plan while collecting crucial data on which to base subsequent strategic planning.
- *Preparation*  
Those who are planning the future of their department, school, college or institution should be adequately prepared for the task. It is unwise to plan without some notion of the many alternative directions and what others have found to be successful. It is common for an educational institution to invite futurists to speak to the planning team prior to the planning event. This helps lift people's thinking past the issues of today and later helps them create the vision of a desired future. Outstanding videotapes are available on change and paradigm shifts. Seeing and discussing these programs helps individuals to prepare to make the small and large changes that are inevitable with or without a strategic plan. Some planning groups have brief book



reviews in which each member reports on the a current book that illuminates the organization's choices. Some groups visit other institutions to get ideas on what is working successfully elsewhere. Preparation that expands the group's perception of what is possible and desirable creates the most innovative and bold plans.

- *A Structured Planning Process*

Most of us have attended at least one meeting where everyone talked but when it was all over, nothing had been accomplished. This common experience points out the need for a structured planning process. Structured means designated and sequenced activities such as brainstorming, small group work, listing, summarizing, prioritizing and the like. Structure requires a facilitator who is responsible for maintaining the process without having input into the content. A structured planning process makes it possible for everyone in attendance to participate fully, while discouraging domination by high-verbal, high-status group members.

The approach to strategic planning used by various departments and offices and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison represents a combination of the eight step strategic planning model for public and non-profit organizations created by Bryson (1988) and the Technology of Participation (ToP) approach developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs, Chicago (Spencer, 1989). The ToP workshop methodology is used by Institute facilitators throughout the world for community development planning.

The model in Figure 1.1 reflects a belief in intellectual fusion--that is, that when people of good will come together to plan and when they are given a structure in which to work together, the results are far superior to what any individual in the group could generate alone. The structure of the process described here helps mitigate the "camel designed by a committee" phenomenon which occurs because of excessive compromise. In the model presented here, the group strives for consensus beginning with individuals, then small groups, then the group as a whole.

In consensus, members commit to supporting the results of the group's work even if they do not agree with every single point in the plan. This support is based on the individual belief that "Even though this is not my favorite choice, I will support it because I believe I had adequate opportunity to discuss my views and this choice is the best one for us at this time." A skilled facilitator will also help the group

resist conglomerating too many ideas such that the original thinking of all of them are lost.

Individuals who were initially cool to a structured planning process often express satisfaction and sometimes delight at the end of the planning event, both for the intellectual stimulation and the tangible results.

- *Resources of Time and Dollars*  
The costs of a sound planning process and the time required for optimal planning were both discussed earlier. Both inadequate time and too much time are detrimental to the process.

### **The Role of the Leader in Strategic Planning**

Planning has been one of the traditional "ings" of management. Some leaders initially experience discomfort at the idea of involving all levels of staff in planning. Some might view involving all levels of staff in planning as abrogating their responsibility. The leader's responsibility, however, is to ensure that a sound planning process occurs and that the budget follows the plan. Thus the leader's role is to create the structure for planning and to participate in the process fully. James Renier, Honeywell Corporation, commented on broad involvement in planning:

*At some point you've got to loosen the reins, delegate. It's almost like being on a battlefield in a fog. It's too much to ask the commander to describe the terrain as if the fog wasn't there...we've got to be willing to listen and say, well, someone else has seen through part of the fog so we'd better listen carefully to that person.*

Senge (1990) uses an ocean liner metaphor to discuss leadership in a learning organization. He suggests that the organizational leader is not the captain or navigator, but rather the designer of the ocean liner. Senge says that the leadership task is designing the learning processes whereby the people in the organization can deal productively with the critical issues and develop mastery in the learning disciplines. Senge says:

This is new work for most experienced managers, many of whom rose to the top because of their decision-making and problem-solving skills, not their skills in mentoring, coaching and helping others learn.  
(p.345)

Characterizing the implementation of a sound planning process as the leader's responsibility is consistent with the designer metaphor. Leaders, though they should participate actively, should not serve as facilitators for their own organizations' planning processes. Their ideas and/or style may inhibit full participation of the group. Similarly, it is seldom advisable for any planning facilitator to participate as a planning team member. The roles of facilitator and participant are generally not compatible and facilitation, of itself, requires one's full attention.

### **Relationship of Strategic Planning to Continuous Quality Improvement**

Quality may be defined as meeting the needs and exceeding the expectations of stakeholders. It is difficult to imagine an organization dedicated to continuously improving its services or products that does not have a strategic plan. One of W. Edwards Deming's basic requirements for continuous quality improvement is constancy of purpose (Gabor, 1990). It is significant that virtually all strategic planning models begin with reviewing, refining or creating the mission statement based on stakeholders and their needs. The mission statement then becomes the foundation upon which all subsequent planning builds.

Strategic planning is a process of identifying some common directions for the department, division, school or college based on needs of the external and internal stakeholders. In a quality environment, all employees share some common understandings and commitments relative to what they wish to accomplish together for their stakeholders. This does not mean that entrepreneurial activity cannot take place, but it does mean that there is some minimal level of shared effort and some common directions. Greater collaboration can yield enormous benefits for the individuals in the department or organization.

Quality improvement processes tend to focus on the operational end of the planning model shown in Figure 1.1 and especially on those critical or core processes that are carried out almost on a daily basis. Quality tools are used to improve processes and subprocesses within the organization, whereas strategic planning serves to focus the efforts of the organization as a whole. Thus, an effective strategic planning process provides a framework within which quality tools and processes can be utilized (Gibson, 1994). Taken together, strategic planning and continuous quality improvement can

dramatically improve the ability of the organization to meet the needs of its internal and external stakeholders.

### **Tying the Budget to the Plan**

*Budgets are basically links between financial resources and human behavior in order to accomplish policy objectives or in other words, budgets are a series of goals with price tags attached.*

Aaron Wildavsky (1984)

A strategic plan is of limited value unless it is used in the budget exercise. It is not uncommon to find institutions whose planning processes have little or no relationship to budgeting processes. The reasons for this are complex and include factors such as the historical pattern of financial decision-making and the availability of accurate financial data throughout the organization. In some cases, organizations simply do not have a means to connect planning and budgeting very well. For those organizations who wish to focus their financial resources via a strategic planning process, this model provides a relatively uncomplicated structure and process for doing so. The example provided here shows how a department's planning and budgeting processes are linked. Figure 1.2 is a sample budgeting form, the Program Plans and Budget Requests form that would be completed by each program (or cost-center or subunit) within the department. Note that each program is required to complete a minimal amount of self-assessment and to have annual objectives. These objectives represent activities that help the department move in the strategic directions identified in the planning process.

This process amounts to a program budgeting approach. In program budgeting, instead of presenting budgetary requests in line-item form for supplies, maintenance, personnel, as is the case with traditional incremental budgeting, requests are made in terms of goals or end-products. Program budgeting is viewed as useful for relating ends to means and emphasizing the policy effects of the budget.

The budgeting process outlined here becomes a very public and intelligible activity in contrast to traditional line item budgeting which Wildavsky says de-emphasizes overt conflict among competing programs. A process that seeks to minimize overt conflict, he says, "encourages secret deliberations, non-partisanship, and the recruitment of personnel who feel comfortable in sidestepping policy decision most of the time" (p. 137).

Wildavsky (1984) makes the point that program budgeting brings to light more overt conflict. He says, "It is much easier to agree on a small addition or decrease than to compare the worth of one program [or goal] to that of all others" (p. 136). The planning model presented here helps mitigate the amount of budgetary conflict by creating, up-front, strategic directions and prioritized goals through a process in which everyone participates, either directly or indirectly.

A certain amount of the total budget can be set aside for opportunistic or entrepreneurial activities that do not necessarily align with the strategic plan. The discretionary budget is a relatively small percentage of the whole, as salaries comprise the majority of the budget in most higher education institutions. Currently, it is not unusual that the entire discretionary budget for a department is used for entrepreneurial activities, with little or no departmental focus.

Note that in the Program Plans and Budget Requests form in Figure 1.2, requests for positions, equipment, and materials over \$500. are submitted as resources needed to accomplish objectives. It has been a practice at the University of Colorado at Boulder that no new positions are approved without a formal strategic plan which shows how the position will enhance effectiveness of the plan. Individual programs, majors, or other subunits submit their plans and budget requests using the form in Figure 1.2.

## PROGRAM PLANS AND BUDGET REQUESTS

**Program(s):**

**Department:**

**Submitted by:**

**1. Major Accomplishments:**

(Anticipated status at the end of the semester. List appropriate data and/or projected accomplishments related to last year's plans.)

**2. Strengths and Opportunities:**

(What are the major strengths of the program? What opportunities exist because of these strengths? What external factors contribute to these strengths and opportunities?)

**3. Limitations, Barriers, Weaknesses:**

(What factors limit progress? What barriers limit future development? Identify any weaknesses that should be addressed in planning for the future.)

**4. What are your 3-5 year goals for this program?**

**5. Objectives:**

List objectives proposed for next year:	What College and/or University Strategic Directions are addressed by each objective?
---	--

**6. What are the curriculum or program changes for the upcoming year?**

**7. What are the projected enrollments for the program?**

**8. List new staff needed (in priority order):**

**9. List new major equipment required (in priority order, \$500 and up):**

**10. List new/modified facilities needed (for capital exercise):**

**11. Identify other major budget changes including activities and expenses from last year which have been deleted in this budget.**

Figure 1.2 Program plans and budget requests

## DEPARTMENT CHAIR'S PLANNING AND BUDGET PRIORITIES

**Department:**

**Programs/Cost Centers Included:**

**Chair:**

**1. Major Accomplishments:** (What has the department achieved in the past year?)

**2. Strengths and Opportunities:**

(What are the major strengths and vitality of this department? What opportunities exist because of these strengths? What external factors contribute to these strengths and opportunities?)

**3. Limitations, Barriers, Weaknesses:**

(What factors limit progress? What barriers limit future development? Which of these are under our control? Identify any weaknesses which should be addressed in planning for the future.)

**4. Long-Range Goals and Objectives:**

(Where is this department moving in the next 3-5 years? What are the long-range directions? What changes will be needed over the next few years? Will this department grow/decline/remain the same in terms of students, staff, and faculty?)

**5. Objectives:**

List objectives proposed for next year:	What College and/or University Strategic Directions are addressed by each objective?
---	--

**6. New Personnel Priorities:**

Identify personnel priorities.	How do these priorities relate to the goals/objectives of the department?
--------------------------------	---

**7. New Equipment Priorities:**

Identify equipment priorities.	How do these priorities relate to the goals/objectives of the department?
--------------------------------	---

**8. Facility Change/Capital Exercise Priorities:**

Identify your facility change/capital exercise priorities.	How do these priorities relate to the goals/objectives of the department?
--	---

**9. What are the implications for other departments or services?** (Attach a separate sheet for this. It will be distributed to the appropriate departments.)

Figure 1.3 Department chair's planning and budget priorities

## **Chair's Role**

Figure 1.3 is the Department Chair's Planning and Budget Priorities form. This is the department chair's priority plan which includes requests for resources. Note that the proposed objectives are shown in relation to a strategic direction. Thus the chair (and/or appropriate committee) still makes budgetary decisions, however, the criteria for these decisions are known in advance and the financial decision-making process is made explicit.

In a school or college, departments would be asked to show how their proposed activities support the strategic directions of the school or college. The school or college would indicate which university themes or strategic directions are being addressed through the school or college's strategic directions and/or goals.

## **Self-Evaluation of Strategic Planning Process**

Following are fourteen questions that those responsible for planning in a department, school, college, division, or higher educational institution as a whole can ask about the strategic and annual planning process. The more heartily these questions can be answered in the affirmative, the more effective the planning exercise is likely to be. These questions are also found in Figure 1.4.

### **1. Does the mission concisely state what will be done for whom?**

A concise mission statement telling what the organization does for whom is the ideal beginning of a strategic plan. If this mission is not clear and agreed upon, the rest of the process will be unsatisfactory. A rambling mission statement is less effective than a finely pointed statement. The mission for the University of Wisconsin-Madison is interpreted as follows: to "create, integrate, transfer and apply knowledge."

### **2. Is the vision a descriptive statement of where and what the organization wants to be in the future?**

The vision statement should be vivid enough that a stakeholder can discern the institution's intentions. For example, "being the best..." doesn't say enough. Such a statement does not provide us with information on what being the "best" would look like. A vision statement



should paint a word picture of what the institution hopes to become. It should stretch the institution to change without being impossible.

**3. Is there evidence that representatives of employees at all levels (faculty, academic staff, support staff, administration) participated in a meaningful way in strategic and annual planning?**

Although every individual in an organization cannot usually participate in all phases of the planning process, everyone can participate in some phase of the process. The model presented here is a representative democracy model in which a group (the planning council) selected to represent the whole is charged with developing the strategic plan. It is the responsibility of all members of the planning council to communicate the preliminary results and seek feedback from the constituencies they represent, whether faculty, staff, administration, support staff or students. In addition, results of staff surveys or other staff input can inform the situational analysis. In the annual planning and budgeting phase, all employees are involved in identifying goals, objectives, activities, and budgetary needs for their work group or unit for the coming year. All employees are involved in determining needed professional development based on the goals and objectives that are developed collaboratively.

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

Like all quality-based processes, this planning model is dependent upon solid information. If information on stakeholders' needs and satisfaction was not available when the current plan was being developed, the plan should include mechanisms for collecting such data within the current budget year.

**5. Are goals prioritized annually?**

It is usually difficult to permanently prioritize strategic directions and major goals since there may be a great deal of interactivity among them. It is useful, however, to prioritize strategic directions and/or goals on an annual basis, focusing first on the actions that tend to drive the others. The important thing is that each staff member is able to prioritize which activities are most critical to concentrate on in a given year.

**6. Are limitations, barriers and weaknesses addressed in goals and objectives?**

In the excitement of planning for the future, it is not difficult to forget about problems and barriers. Some of this "forgetting" is actually necessary in order to push past the present and into the future. However, it is important to reconsider the problems and barriers when developing strategic directions. The question groups ask themselves is, "What do we have in our favor (a strength or opportunity) that can help us get over, around or through this barrier?" It is not necessary to have a strategic direction for every barrier, however the best strategies attack several problems at once. Also, it is helpful to identify early in the process which barriers or problems are most harmful so that when strategic directions are identified, a check can be done to ensure that the most potent problems or barriers are addressed in the plan.

**7. Is there evidence in strategic and operational plans that planners looked beyond immediate day-to-day concerns and into the future?**

One of the things that distinguishes strategic planning from traditional long-range planning is the assumption that the future will not be a linear extension of the past. A good planning process anticipates probable future(s) by collecting information from internal and external sources. Some groups have a futurist come in to speak about future trends. Some groups have book reviews in advance of the planning event. Some take today's figures on enrollments and/or revenues and show how different future scenarios would affect the institution. The planning process itself should involve a structured, formal effort to anticipate future trends and the changing needs of stakeholders.

**8. Does the plan show that choices have been made in terms of types of service or activities, delivery system, who will be served, geographic scope, processes used, and the like?**

Strategic planning requires a willingness to focus resources. Thus it is unlikely that an organization would continue doing everything it had done in the past in the same way if the organization was serious about planning strategically.

**9. Do measures of success test the underlying hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships?**

This question assumes that measures of success have been identified for goals and/or key activities. These measures of success should go beyond "process" measures such as "report completed" or "course redesigned" although these process measures are also important. Kaplan and Norton (1996) characterize strategy as a set of hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships. Feedback (termed "measures of success" here) should be able to "test, validate, and modify the hypotheses imbedded in ...strategy" (p. 84). For example, the decision of an academic department to redesign a course or courses is based on the assumption that something will improve as a result. If no attempt is made to determine what changed as a result of the effort (Did students grasp key concepts as reflected in exam grades? Did a higher percentage satisfactorily complete? Could students demonstrate deeper levels of understanding and mastery?), the department has no way to know if its hypothesis was right and whether the work of redesigning was worth the effort. Even more importantly, if nothing is learned about the effects of the redesign beyond the fact that it was done, the faculty have no new information on which to base future decisions about course redesign.

**10. Do annual plans show evidence of cooperation, collaboration and/or integration of resources?**

Another of the anticipated results of strategic planning is that by taking the time to study and better understand the organization and the milieu in which it functions, people begin to see new possibilities for leveraging their resources with other groups' resources. Particularly in higher education where the decrease in public funding is affecting almost all departments and units in some way, there are savings to be gained by cooperating, collaborating or pooling resources. For example, it is a common scenario to have a similar course offered by two departments, each course with a low enrollment. A cooperative agreement for both departments to alternately offer the course (by semester or year) would free up faculty in one of the departments for research, teaching other courses, curriculum development, service or other activities. In another scenario, very small departments can share administrative staff and services. (Sharing administrative costs with other departments may be the only way some very small, specialized departments can remain in existence.) Campus administrative units can pool funds for activities such as professional development or printed informational literature.

These opportunities seldom surface in day-to-day operations, but can become plainly possible through a planning process.

**11. Are formal progress reports presented at least once during each year?**

To ensure that progress is being made toward meeting the goals that move the organization in its strategic directions, it is essential that progress reports are presented to the organization at least once in a given fiscal year. Holding people accountable for specific activities helps ensure that the plan is not forgotten. In fact, check dates should be identified for each goal or major activity early in the planning process.

**12. Is there a copy of the strategic plan (or a summary) in the hands of every full-time staff member?**

Not only should employees have a piece of paper that outlines the mission, vision and strategic direction of their department, school/college/division or institutions, employees should be able to articulate the key themes. If the strategic plan cannot be generally understood by the people who make it a reality, it is not much of a plan.

Many institutions have taken the key elements of their strategic planning process and created a mission/vision/strategy brochure that can go out to all employees reinforcing the commitment to some common directions or goals. (Following a strategic planning process, one school district added the mission statement to its stationery and had the mission painted on the wall of the gymnasium as a reminder to everyone.)

**13. When a major decision must be made, is the strategic plan consulted?**

One of the major reasons for going through a planning process is to help focus the efforts of an organization. It would be counter-productive to make those decisions and then ignore them during times of crisis or stress. Since new opportunities and problems will continually present themselves, the plan should serve as a guide for dealing with them. If the plan doesn't offer guidance on which issues or needs to pursue or address and which should be left to others, something is lacking. Either the plan's power to inform decision-making has not be fully realized or the plan itself is too abstract to be useful or there were opportunities

and problems that were not anticipated in the situational analysis and environmental scanning phases of the process.

#### **14. Does the budget follow the plan?**

As was suggested earlier, it is essential that the budget follow the plan. If there is no intention to align resources with the planning process or no feasible mechanism with which to do so, there is little point to engaging in the exercise. Internal and external constituents can become cynical and hostile if they have devoted their time and energy to a task that has no real impact on resource decisions.

Bryson (1988) provides good advice regarding the utility of planning, "It is strategic thinking and acting that are important, not strategic planning." He says that any strategic planning activity that gets in the way of strategic thought and action should be scrapped (p. 2).

<b>Self-Evaluation of Strategic Planning Process</b>	
<b>1.</b>	Does the mission concisely state what will be done for whom?
<b>2.</b>	Is the vision a descriptive statement of where and what the organization wants to be in the future?
<b>3.</b>	Is there evidence that representatives of employees at all levels (faculty, academic staff, support staff, administration) participated in a meaningful way in strategic and annual planning?
<b>4.</b>	Is there evidence that data on the needs of all the stakeholders but especially those from outside of the organization were sought and used in the planning process?
<b>5.</b>	Are goals prioritized annually?
<b>6.</b>	Are limitations, barriers and weaknesses addressed in goals and objectives?
<b>7.</b>	Is there evidence in strategic and operational plans that planners looked beyond immediate day-to-day concerns and into the future?
<b>8.</b>	Does the plan show that choices have been made in terms of types of service or activities, delivery system, who will be served, geographic scope, processes used, and the like?
<b>9.</b>	Do measures of success test the underlying hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships?
<b>10.</b>	Do annual plans show evidence of cooperation, collaboration and/or integration of resources?
<b>11.</b>	Are formal progress reports presented at least once during each year?
<b>12.</b>	Is there a copy of the strategic plan (or a summary) in the hands of every full-time staff member?
<b>13.</b>	When a major decision must be made, is the strategic plan consulted?
<b>14.</b>	Does the budget follow the plan?

Figure 1.4 Questions for self-evaluation of strategic plan process

## References

- Bryson, J. (1988). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Gabor, A. (1990). *The man who discovered quality*. New York: Random House.
- Gibson, J. (1994). *Continuous improvement on a tradition of excellence: Lessons from the study tour on total quality in a university setting*. Ottawa, Ontario: The Conference Board of Canada.
- Jurinski, J. (1993). *Strategic planning*. Saranac Lake, NY: American Management Association.
- Kaplan, R. and Norton, D. (January-February, 1996) Using the balanced scorecard as a strategic management system. *Harvard Business Review*. pp.75-85.
- Keller, G. (1983). *Academic strategy: The management revolution in American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- McConkey, D. (1981). Strategic planning in nonprofit organizations. *Business Quarterly* (School of Business, University of Western Ontario). 46(2), 24-33.
- Mintzberg, H. (1994). *The rise and fall of strategic planning*. New York: Macmillan, Inc.
- Simmons & Pohl. (1994). *Leveraging areas for strategic planning in a university setting*. Unpublished manuscript, Office of Quality Improvement, University of Wisconsin- Madison.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday.
- Spencer, L. (1989) *Winning through participation*. Dubuque: Kendall-Hunt.
- Wildavsky, A. (1984). *The politics of the budgetary process*. (4th ed.). Boston: Little, Brown.

