Implementing the Strategic Plan

The biggest challenge in planning is making the plan work!

by Daniel James Rowley and Herbert Sherman

The importance of strategic planning in colleges and universities has been well established. Perhaps beginning with Keller (1983), it has become increasingly more important to understand that the world of today for higher education is different from the world of the past. Keller says that a strategic planning process is essential to help campuses make a successful transition from what has been to what is now and to what will be in the future. Starr (1993) states that colleges and universities need to use strategic planning to adequately redefine their intellectual and moral identities. Morrison, Penetro, and Boucher (1984) and Shirley (1989) recognize the importance of strategic planning in helping align today's campuses with the demands of increasingly vocal stakeholders in order to create a more secure and relevant learning environment. Dolence and Norris (1995) cite the strategic planning process as a means to help campuses reengineer their structures and educational products to meet the emerging needs of the Information Age more adequately. Finally, in their study of strategic planning in the academy, Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) state that strategic planning is
crucially important in creating a dynamic fit between the institution of higher learning and its environment.

Strategic planning normally occurs where both internal and external pressures create a sense of crisis, one that indicates that the status quo is no longer acceptable. It is difficult to lead a strategic planning process when most influential decision makers throughout the organization (or the campus) do not see the need for change. However, when the forces for change are so strong that a majority of decision makers understand that the organization must move in a different direction, strategic planning makes more sense and has greater support.

It is not surprising, then, that many colleges and universities around the United States and around the world have engaged in strategic planning. Many feel the discomfort of the criticisms they face from a growing number of societal constituencies (Leslie and Fretwell 1996), accreditation bodies (Thompson et al. 1990), and even constituents inside the academy (Menand 1991). They seek to find ways of managing their campuses that honor their past, celebrate their accomplishments, and yet create a viable format for future success. Many have come to believe that strategic planning is their best option for achieving these goals and have engaged in often time-consuming and resource-intensive planning processes. Many understand that doing business as usual is no longer acceptable and turn to strategic planning to help chart a more viable future course of action. However, many of these same institutions of higher education have not been successful in carrying out their strategic plans (Birnbaum 2000).

This problem is not unique to institutions of higher education. Mintzberg (1994) suggests that many for-profit and not-for-profit institutions have had problems with their strategic planning processes. He goes on to state that the process is a complex and dynamic event, that unless the plan (and the process) allows for fluidity and flexibility, it will most likely fail. He goes a bit further and asks, “[M]ight the real problem not so much be in either poor implementation or weak formulation as in forcing an artificial separation between the two?” (p. 26). He further suggests that while many planners create static plans (he’s against this), they also tend to create open implementation processes. This is backward. Mintzberg argues that the formulation process should be open and implementation should be “closed-ended and convergent” (p. 60).

With these levels of complexity, it is easy to understand why many people are critical of strategic planning. In the literature, critics such as Birnbaum (2000) have labeled strategic planning as a fad because the tools employed seem to be in the developmental stage. Birnbaum’s solution to this problem—that “higher education does not need more good management techniques; it needs more good managers” (p. 239)—is based on his definition of management as “commonsensical” (p. 240). Lindblom’s (1959) and Simon’s (1976) early work in decision making supports this notion of a less rigorous and rational manager who uses incrementalism to produce results that are good enough or satisfying.

Ironically, commonsense management according to Birnbaum—decentralized authority, producing quality products, providing responsive service, formulating strategies that are based on distinctive capabilities, giving equitable rewards for performance, and being socially responsive (pp. 240–41)—seems to address much of the content of the planning literature and is rarely practiced in postsecondary institutions (Lewis and Smith 1994).

**Focusing on concrete implementation, not just formulation.** If Birnbaum is correct in writing that academic administrators know the proper way to manage, then what happens between the knowing and the doing? One of us recently attended a faculty meeting where the administration was defending its decision to select an academic dean unilaterally, move an academic program overseas, and deny a department’s selection of a chairperson. The provost and the president continually asserted collegiality as the proper mode of decision making but kept emphasizing the necessity of making those decisions quickly and effectively. What the faculty saw (not what they heard) was that the ends justified the means and collegiality be damned.

The gap between saying and doing (thought and action) highlights a critical point in the planning process. If planning is what people in organizations do, not what they say they’re going to do, then their (or the organization’s) intent is secondary to their actions and the results of those actions. By focusing upon those actions, academic administrators can determine how execution affects organizational outcomes (Levy, Meltner, and Wildavsky 1974).

This article seeks to clarify why this is true and present a series of options that campus leaders might consider in moving from the process of planning to the process of implementation.
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Moving from Planning to Implementation

A variety of issues surface when one is looking at the ability of a campus to implement a completed strategic plan. Certainly, one issue is the perceived worthiness of the plan itself. Unfortunately, no litmus test is available to help determine whether a particular campus strategic plan is entirely appropriate for any given campus or any given situation. Each campus and each situation is unique. Therefore, one needs to take a different approach to determine whether a campus should try to proceed with implementing its developed strategic plan. Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) proposed that the best way to determine whether a plan is worthy of implementation is to determine the soundness of the planning process itself. Those processes that successfully develop an objective understanding of external and internal conditions and then propose methods that use institutional resources in the most effective manner to take advantage of identified and emerging educational opportunities will most likely result in the creation of a viable plan. If those conditions are met, perhaps the resulting plan should not be implemented. The plan must be open and fluid (Mintzberg 1984) and adjust to conditions both inside and outside the institution.

Further, college and university campuses are complex entities, where the notion of shared governance is often a reality (especially in the United States). Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) state that planning in a participative environment is the best way to ensure that a wider spectrum of the campus community will accept the strategic plan. Although self-governance with team management is the preferred style of planning, it is also very time consuming and resource intensive. As a result, some campuses use either a top-down or committee method of planning. This can result in the creation of a plan, but not campuswide support for it, and ultimate failure when top campus leaders try to implement the plan. In such a setting, many across the campus might not see much value in the strategic plan because they were not involved in its creation.

At the same time, it is incorrect to assume that unless the strategic plan is formulated by a broad campus effort, it is neither valuable nor important enough to justify implementation. In a crisis situation, top campus leaders might be justified in forcing the implementation of a strategic plan to save the campus (Steeples 1990), assuming that the planning process has adequately met the requirements stated above. This is not the preferred situation, but under such circumstances campus leaders would be negligent if they did not try to overcome serious problems in a strategic manner and make changes based on a strategic plan to help reorient the campus back to health. Apparently, then, it is not always an issue of how the plan was derived or how it was ultimately implemented. Mintzberg (1984) warned of this as he identified organization constituents who are, first, fearful of a deterministic and concrete planning process, and, second, wary of an undefined and fluid implementation process. It is more an issue of the unique conditions of the situation and the appropriateness of certain courses of action within those conditions that determine the success of the implementation process.

Once a campus can assure itself that it has a good plan and it understands the circumstances it faces in attempting to implement that plan, then it needs to examine its options regarding the physical process of implementation. The implementation environment must first be identified, and an appropriate implementation method must then be selected.

Identifying the implementation environment.

Perhaps one of the major reasons a college or university is unable to implement its strategic plan successfully is that it miscalculates the willingness of the campus to accept the plan. Flack (1994) suggests that implementation must take place in an accepting political environment; otherwise, the process will most likely fail. Hardy (1991) also suggests that campus politics is often irrational and defies logic, as it seems to undermine reasonable and appropriate decisions made by certain parochial groups. Dooris and Lozier (1990) warn of this potential problem in their description of campus politics and the ability of certain groups to block the actions of others.

This is not to suggest that campus politics is always negative or even obstructive—politics often plays an important role in campus decision making. Birnbaum (1991) states that politics can be a force that clarifies problems and identifies remedies. This is good. However, Hardy (1991) warns that a situation in which various campus constituencies feel threatened or neglected can lead to conflict. Perhaps the best solution is that proposed by
Cyert (1968), who states that working within the political system is an effective tactic. Though time consuming, working to communicate and negotiate with various political factions can eventually lead to agreement.

The political environment, while important, is not the only environment that affects the ability of a campus to implement its strategic plan. Other conditions that exist inside and outside the college or university can be positive or negative and can affect the implementation process. The resource environment is clearly an issue as governments (in the case of public institutions) and givers (a major power in private institutions) have become more and more concerned with issues of accountability and the worthiness of higher education institutions to receive funding above other fiscal demands (Horne 1996). Not only has the resource environment become more competitive, it has also shrunk in many areas, causing major fiscal problems for campuses around the United States and the world.

These environments among others put pressure on a campus to act in one way or another. The implementation process is seldom successful if it does not at least acknowledge and attempt to conform to the driving forces found in these environments. There is just too much ambiguity and lack of solid outcome identification for many (Mintzberg 1994), which leads to the failure of the entire process.

**Implementation choices.** To overcome these potential problems, Mintzberg (1994) has suggested that organizations develop specific, closed-ended, and convergent methods of implementation. Implementation is a delicate process, and as campus leaders (both administrative and academic) move from planning to implementation, they need to seek methods of implementation that address the particular circumstances of their individual campuses (Rowley and Sherman 2001), as we have argued above. To accommodate the successful implementation of a campus strategic plan, two things are important: (1) strategic planners must know their options for implementing the plan and (2) selecting the appropriate method of implementation will help assure a higher level of success. In the following section, we develop these two ideas more completely.

**Eleven Implementation Options**

Following are the methods that campus leaders can use to implement strategic change effectively:

- Using the budget
- Implementation through participation
- Using force to implement the strategic plan
- Establishing goals and key performance indicators
- Working with the human resource management structure
- Using the reward system
- Using faculty and staff development
- Working with or changing institutional culture
- Manipulating the role of tradition
- Developing and using change champions
- Building on successful systems

As figure 1 suggests, planners can institute two of these methods (using the budget and using force) on a more immediate, short-term basis. These short-term options influence the cause-and-effect relationships within the institution that result in immediate change (Kotter 1976). One might choose one of these options if the campus situation is dire and needs immediate change. One might also choose one of these options if the need for change is great, but not dire, meaning that the planning figure 1 Implementation Options

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**External Environment**

**Long-Term Options**
1. Human Resource Management Structure
2. Institutional Culture
3. Tradition

**Intermediate-Term Options**
1. Reward System
2. Participation
3. Goals and Key Performance Indicators
4. Change Champions
5. Faculty and Staff Development
6. Successful Systems

**Short-Term Options**
1. Budget
2. Force
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and Implementation process could occur in a scheduled
time frame.

Intermediate-term options that one can use to imple-
ment a strategic plan include using the reward system,
using participation, establishing goals and key perfor-
ance indicators, developing and using change cham-
pions, using faculty and staff development, and building on sys-
tems that are ready for change. These options realign the
internal operations of the college or university so that
they fit well and are consistent and congruous with one
another (Kotter 1978). Misalignments can occur in a col-
lege’s operation due to external organizational influences
as well as changes within a college’s specific internal sys-
tem. For example, a change in the registration process
(from in-person to online or telephone call-in) may affect
not only how students register (short-term, cause-effect)
because of other student services, such as academic advising
and student billing.

The last three options are long-term in nature and
deal with the relative flexibility or adaptability of the col-
lege or university (Kotter 1978). These options (working
within the human resource management system, working
with the institutional culture, and working with tradition)
take longer periods of time to develop and provide addi-
tional advice for campus leaders and strategic planners
who need to look further into the issues that accompany
implementation.

In the following sections, we provide a brief descrip-
tion of each of these options along with examples of
how specific colleges and universities have used these
strategies to implement their campus strategic plans
successfully. We then discuss how planners can select
the option that will provide optimal benefits for their
particular situation.

Note that the examples are those found in the litera-
ture and generally reflect situational rather than longitudi-
nal findings. The cases we chose represent both the posi-
tive and negative experiences that various authors and
various campuses have experienced and are not exhaus-
tive. However, these examples do provide evidence that
the methods of implementation we have proposed can be
found in the experience of various campuses around the
United States and may well merit further consideration.

Using the budget. Perhaps the most effective
method of implementing a strategic plan is through build-
ing a budget that supports it. Ansoff (1995) suggested that
budgeting was the key to implementing a successful
strategic plan. An institution’s budget is the single most
powerful activity on campus. Control of the budget is con-
trol of the strategic plan as well as control of the campus.
This is clearly one of the reasons many factions on cam-
pus involve themselves as much as possible in the annual
planning process. Swain (1988) recognized the Importance
of tying budgeting to the strategic plan as he helped suc-
scessfully direct an early form of strategic planning at the
University of Louisville. Poach (1988) also used budgeting
to implement a later successful strategic planning effort at
West Texas State University. In another example, the
University of Central Florida used a formula-based budget-
ning system based on its strategic plan to tie institutional
priorities to resource allocation and resource management
(AASCU 1993). Finally, administrators at the University of
Southern Colorado used strategic goal priorities to free up
$3.2 million (16 percent of its state budget allocation) to
achieve 12 major strategic goals it had identified in its
strategic plan (AASCU 1993).

Certainly, one problem is that budgets are themselves
constrained. There are never enough resources to meet all
demands and requests. However, one advantage of having
a strategic plan to help guide budgeting is that campus
strategic priorities come to the fore and help identify
the most crucial budget areas that affect the long-term suc-
cess and survivability of the campus. To ensure a success-
ful strategic plan, those who are involved with the budget
must also be involved in the strategic planning process.
Additionally, planners need to build budget considerations
into the plan as they develop it.

Implementation through participation. While
implementation through budgeting is extremely effective,
this method is more regulatory and administrative in
nature. Participation offers a more democratic and egal-
tarian approach, which may be more effective over time
(Rowley, Lujan, and Dolenca 1997; Birnbaum 1991).
Participation means that everyone affected by a process
is involved in the decision making that leads to a final
decision as well as with implementation. Simply, people
almost always support changes they themselves have
proposed.

Unfortunately, a participative atmosphere does not
exist on all campuses. In its place is a decision-making
system that is riddled with parochial politics and bereft of
significant cooperation. Further, it is the lack of participa-
tion and accompanying distrust and power struggles that
lead to the failure of the strategic planning process in

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many colleges and universities. As Swenk (1996) described, an unsuccessful strategic planning process at a western university occurred primarily because administrators failed to encourage or even allow faculty to participate in the process.

Leadership appears to be a crucial aspect of developing a participative environment and then using it to implement strategy successfully. The responsibility for assuring that participation occurs lies with the chief executive officer, the president, or chancellor of the campus (Keller 1983). Understanding the important role of participation requires that the president or chancellor not simply recognize the imperatives of participation, but strongly support them. Participation works. Cline and Meringolo (1991) relate that in its successful planning event, the leadership of The Pennsylvania State University was so concerned about assuring participation by a broad sector of the campus constituency that it placed particular emphasis on developing participation within its strategic planning and implementation processes. Brown (1988) credits participation by both faculty and administrators at The University of North Carolina at Asheville for the success of its strategic plan in taking a relatively new campus and building bridges between the campus and the community. Morrell (1988) credits a highly collegial and cooperative group of faculty and administrators for the success of strategic planning at Centre College in reversing both enrollment declines and budget deficits.

Using force to implement the strategic plan. In most college and university situations, the use of force to create and implement a strategic plan is a very bad idea. However, there are exceptions. The most obvious exception is the situation of crisis. When a college or university finds itself in a life-threatening situation, force may be the only way of making significant changes that will save the campus. Steeple (1988) provides us with an excellent example of such a situation when he describes the perils and ultimate resurgence of Westminster College in Salt Lake City. Founded in 1874, it had a history of poor planning, poor governance, and chaotic external events. In the 1970s and 1980s, things went from bad to worse and the campus had to face closure decisions twice. Under a new president and a strong board, the college decided to do strategic planning to salvage the situation. The plan called for major reenforcement and refocusing, and by the end of the 1980s, stability had returned to the campus. Enrollments started to climb once again, and the long history of financial deficits was over as the college began to run budget surpluses. The campus began to look forward to a much brighter future than had seemed possible only a few years before.

Fortunately, very few campuses face the type of dire situation Westminster College faced and therefore do not need to go to the extremes that it did in charting a new direction. In a crisis situation, force may be the only alternative—but it should always be the last alternative.

The bottom line here is that it is more important for the institution to survive than it is for individual programs or individual people to stay with the institution. Without this type of understanding, it is entirely possible that the strategic plan will get sidetracked, the situation will continue to deteriorate, and ultimately, the institution will fail.

Establishing goals and key performance indicators. As Rowley (1987) suggests, another method of implementing change is the use of goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). This method is based on a series of achievement goals that quantify all the issues the strategic plan has addressed. Therefore, KPIs work more easily for quantifiable areas of the strategic plan than for nonquantifiable areas. Issues such as enrollment management, affirmative action goals, budgeting, and endowments easily fit into a KPI model. Quality issues, especially those related to academics, are much more difficult to relate to KPIs, but not impossible. One method that often works is to use surrogate measures to serve as proxies for quality events. For example, members of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) can administer a standardized exit exam that measures each learner's performance on business and economics knowledge and then the AACSB can provide individual, school, and national comparisons. For the KPI method of implementation to be effective, it is important that all areas of the campus participate, find ways of measuring performance, and be committed to carrying out the plan to achieve strategic objectives. At West Texas State University, for example, division heads developed a series of key result areas that helped.
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division members track their goals and progress in that campus’s successful strategic planning exercise (Roach 1988). At Penn State Hazleton, the long-range planning committee closely monitors, on an ongoing basis, several strategic indicators that measure university performance in enrollment management, academic programming, and academic results as well as site and capital goal attainment (Penn State Hazleton 2000).

Working with the human resource management structure. The campus strategic plan should be long-term in nature. Naturally, over time, the mix of people across the entire campus changes. This is a real opportunity to implement the strategic plan in a humane, yet purposeful manner. By determining the future direction of the campus and then using the human resource management (HRM) system to implement it over time, the current structure will change to accommodate even the most major campus changes without negatively affecting the present human base. For more immediate problems, where a reduction in force is clearly needed, the HRM system can also adapt a benevolent approach to help staff and faculty land on their feet. For example, the University of Southern Colorado made some major decisions about its direction within a broadly recognized strategic plan (Shirley 1989). The plan included a call for the reduction or elimination of some programs, staff, and faculty in preparation for strengthening other programs and potential centers of excellence. Southern Colorado approached the reduction in faculty and staff positions by notifying people as early as two years in advance, providing some out-placement and relocation services (AASCU 1993). These considerate actions helped the strategic planning process move forward by keeping people across the campus informed and by handling the human resources of the campus with respect and care.

Using the reward system. Another way to implement the strategic plan is to reward people for positive execution of the plan. Simply, people respond better to the planning process if they believe it will benefit them, and rewarding them for their efforts is clearly a benefit. Not all rewards need be monetary (although some can and should be). Release time, program development and recognition, personal recognition, improved relationships, a sense of community, and a sense of accomplishment are all non-revenue-related rewards that provide individuals with a positive outcome for their efforts. Clemson University tied strategic benchmark activities of faculty performance in its strategic plan directly to the reward sys-

tem, which helped Clemson successfully implement its plan (Bennett 1994). Campus leaders at the State University of New York at Geneseo were able to move its strategic plan along by creating a $100,000 capital venture fund (with home office support) to improve its research activities (AASCU 1993).

Using faculty and staff development. As institutions look to shift their academic direction over time based on their strategic plan, they may review their human resource base at all levels and ask how appropriate the current skill base is for serving future needs. The result of this analysis may be that the current staff should change to better meet strategic goals. A second HRM option, then, is to engage in faculty and staff development and to reengineer the HRM base. By retraining and realigning the human resources of the campus as trends become clear, leaders and planners can retain valuable people and keep them current.

One interesting example of how a campus should use faculty and staff development to achieve change occurred at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) in Inverness, Scotland. Created in the 1990s, the university is a consolidation of 13 small colleges in the northern half of Scotland. In addition to the challenge of creating one university out of 13 different and dispersed campuses, UHI also decided to challenge traditional teaching methods and truly implement a new philosophy of teaching where the learner is paramount in the educational process. This represented a potential implementation nightmare, UHI decided to devote a significant portion—as much as 10 percent—of its budget to faculty and staff development, and as the consolidation moved forward, the new learning philosophy was implemented right along with it.

Working with or changing institutional culture. One can define culture as the pattern of behaviors that organizational members exhibit in conducting the central operations of the organization. This pattern of behaviors describes the attitudes, motivations, and predispositions that people throughout an organization tend to conform to when they do their work. In this academy, if one looks at how people conduct their activities, these cultural patterns become immediately apparent. Further, being part of a particular college or university campus is like being part of a brotherhood, a sacred position that deserves to be protected at all costs. This is a very strong culture and difficult to change.
In the strategic planning process, it is apparent that if campus leaders and planners do not acknowledge and confront the type of culture of their campus, the full weight of that powerful culture can become a formidable barrier to change. Swenk (1999), for example, found that the problems faced at a western university were partially the failure of implementers to recognize and adapt to the cultural differences between faculty and administrator decision-making styles.

Incorporating culture into the strategic change process involves a series of steps. First, it is important to recognize that the culture exists. Second, it is important to understand that the culture is strong. Third, it is important to determine that the culture can be as much of an ally as an foe. Fourth, it is important to build the change from inside the culture. Finally, fifth, it is important to use culture as a way to weave the change more permanently into the fabric of campus life. When the norms of the culture include the acceptance of a strategic academic plan that will help make the campus and the individual professors all better prepared for the future in a positive way, then the plan will go forward with essentially no resistance.

**Manipulating the role of tradition.** Tradition is part of an institution’s culture and by its very nature is long-term in orientation. It speaks to a large degree to what the college or university has become. Tradition is historic and honored, a source of reverence, awe, and inspiration. Upon simply hearing an institution’s name, people imagine its past glories (or in some cases tragedies) and ascribe certain values. Every campus has its traditions, and these traditions have a role in the strategic planning process.

Traditions may well be linked to mission. While Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) show little regard for statements of mission, they agree with many writers in the field that identifying mission is a crucial part of the planning process. Further, tradition speaks to alumni, donors, potential students, and the community as well as on-campus students, faculty, and staff. Tradition is strong and pervasive, and strategic planners need to be careful when they define the campus strategic planning and implementation processes that the positive aspects of tradition are not placed in jeopardy. Campus leaders who develop a plan that is compatible with tradition should find the implementation process much easier. Finally, upon examination, positive traditions have always been built upon dynamic programs and historic events. Being able to tie the strategic planning process to an enhancement of positive traditions, for this reason, is a powerful way of helping to support the implementation process.

**Developing and using change champions.** In their discussion of strategic planning, Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) suggest that college and university professors have developed the overwhelming majority of new offerings in Internet learning. A large percentage of faculty are already making the changes their campuses are trying to cope with in the strategic planning process. Further, these faculty members are potentially significant allies in the change process. All campus leaders and planners need to do is identify them and then bring them into the planning process.

These people are often enthusiastic about the changes they are implementing and can be excellent resources in recruiting, training, and helping other professors set up the specific course structure the campus wishes to support. By including them in the process, by providing them with support for their ideas, and by building appropriate parts of the strategic plan with them, leaders and planners find that these people return to their own activities excited and eager to help bring about the change.

Brown (1988) gives an interesting example by relating how The University of North Carolina at Asheville created the University Planning Council, a board of highly influential faculty and administrators who worked cooperatively with the chancellor to develop a successful strategic plan. This plan achieved its goals of transforming a relatively new campus, that of a community college, into a four-year institution with programs of excellence, and creating a comparative advantage in its service area. Cyert (1986) states that the president or chancellor often must be the change champion. As president of Carnegie Mellon University, Cyert spent many years working with deans, department chairs, and faculty to create changes in programs that provided more focus, vision, and excellence.

**Building on successful systems.** According to an old adage, “nothing breeds success like success.” For a campus strategic plan to be successful, it is important to implement it in an incremental fashion. Leaders and planners can experience success in the early stages of the implementation process by carefully selecting parts of the plan that they know will be easier and more straightforward to implement. With this success, they will have support in taking the next implementation steps.
Incremental implementation also allows leaders and planners to build trust with some of the more skeptical campus constituents. By carefully choosing the first areas for change and by demonstrating success, campus leaders can point out to the campus that nothing of a deleterious nature occurred. The change was implemented, and nothing bad happened. The same is true after the second change, the third change, and so on.

Linking Strategic Planning and Strategic Implementation

The 11 options for implementing a strategic plan represent differing approaches. While there is some overlap (tradition and culture, for example), these options suggest different orientations, different time frames, and different constituencies that might characterize one strategic planning setting versus another.

Which option should planners choose? The answer depends on the circumstances within which implementation will occur. Planners must do their homework to understand the campus predisposition and then review the 11 different options as a set of choices. In the best of circumstances, one particular piece of the plan will require one particular method of implementation. However, it is possible that more than one method will be needed. For example, in devising and implementing a strategic academic plan, particularly one that involves repositioning or downsizing, leaders and planners might want to use culture and human resource management as well as budgeting both to create and to implement the plan.

In any event, campus leaders and planners must have a fairly complete knowledge of their campuses, the needs for change, and their options for implementing those changes in order to have the proper data sets from which to draw their change scenarios. In addition, campus leaders need to be committed to the promises of strategic planning and be willing to do the work that is needed to make sure that the plan is appropriate and flexible (Mintzberg 1984) and that they can identify a proper implementation strategy to solidify the process. Cooperation, participation, broad-ranging discussion, and compromise will help develop a team commitment and direct a successful implementation.

Each of the implementation strategies we have presented in this article represent action-driven activities that may be successful in helping a college or university implement its strategic plan. However, these methods of implementation also require the commitment of the campus leaders and strategic planners to move ahead with the implementation efforts. These options can work, but only when the proper groundwork has been established: the homework has been completed, and the commitment to succeed is strong. Hopefully, the result will be that of a successful strategic planning exercise.

References


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**Noteworthy Quotes**

"A learning organization can be recognized from the outside by its agility in changing how it relates to the external world and how it conducts its internal operations. It can be recognized from the inside by an ethos in which learning from challenges and mistakes is central."


"Collegiality and autonomy are finally means, not ends in themselves—means to the end of building a university capable of greater achievement."

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