STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Challenge and The Solution

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DECLARATION ...

- As the 21st Century opened, Hurricane Katrina and the Great Recession found our academic and public institutions without plans for managing their economic impacts.

- IT SHOULD NOT HAVE!
STRATEGIC PLANNING: A Well Established History …

- **Strategic Planning** … A process for setting and meeting long-range operational objectives for an organization.

- **Strategic Planning** … An accepted business practice for more than half a century.

- **Strategic Planning** … Cities, universities and their libraries have been preparing and implementing them since the 1980’s (when made an integral part of academic & municipal planning).
Economic recessions and depressions have been a known operational threat to for-profit and non-profit institutions for well over a century.
STRATEGIC PLANNING:  

The Process …

- Defining the institution’s vision, mission & values.
- Ascertaining its current state of affairs.
- Determining achievable objectives that significantly advance its mission over the next few-to-several years.
- Identifying & evaluating internal & external Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats affecting mission accomplishment (“SWOT”).
- Deciding upon and carrying out an operational plan for reaching the objectives selected … by (1) maximizing strengths & opportunities, (2) minimizing threats [“risks”] & weaknesses and (3) continuously assessing plan effectiveness to close the gap between vision & reality and make adjustments as needed for success.
TODAY’S PLANNING QUESTION:
Why did our academic and public institutions fail to have strategic plans in place to deal effectively with our Great Recession?

THE ANSWER:
Our leaders & their strategic planning committees … the ones we sit on … let us down –
All Victims of the Great Disconnect!
STRATEGIC PLANNING: The Great Disconnect …

Focusing on the Vision of a Perfect Future to the Exclusion of Daily Reality.
THE GREAT DISCONNECT: The Consequence …

No effort is made to close the gap between goals & threats …

A fatal emphasis on the positives (e.g., “securing adequate funding”)

that ignores the negatives (e.g., “limiting the costs of an economic downturn”).
THE GREAT DISCONNECT: An Inexcusable Lapse …

- The existence of our economy’s continuous economic boom-bust cycle was & remains a well know threat … A risk to be managed.

- Strategic planning encompasses assessing and accounting for external threats & internal weaknesses (as well as opportunities & strengths) … Proper strategic planning demands operational planning that both minimizes known risks and maximizes expected opportunities.

- That the Great Recession surprised economic gurus, big business and federal & state governments means only that their strategic planning was as poor as that of everyone else, not that academia & municipalities couldn’t have planned better or that economic cycles can’t be better managed.
Our academic & public institutions must ever embrace & execute all elements of the strategic planning cycle, if future recessions are to be dealt with effectively:

*Always* identifying and planning for the management of *all* known external threats & internal weaknesses (in addition to internal strengths & external opportunities) …

Because possibilities excluded from a strategic plan are ignored & cannot be readily dealt with when they come about.
PLANNING: What Should Be Done ...

Successful Universities Insure against the Known Eventuality of Economic Downturns ...

- **Directly, *such as*:**
  - By identifying programs that are mission-essential & those not *and* planning for an orderly suspension or elimination of the later when needed;
  - By incorporating flexibility into fiscal procedures with the establishment of a suitable rainy-day fund & provision for the carryover of unspent funds to the next year during recessions;
  - By requiring conservative investment of all funds.

- **Indirectly, *such as*:** By adopting & implementing a strategic plan that ... through continuous assessment & improvement ... so executes its mission that the institution moves significantly toward achieving its vision & thereby positions itself to receive funds budgeted for & donations given to universities that perform well.
PLANNING: A Political Process …

A Thriving University Also Accounts for the Fact that Strategic Planning Is a Political Process:

▪ Necessitating participatory buy-in from its members … Listening to constituents, collaborating with colleagues & the like, all of whom are inclined to emphasize the positive, ignore the negative and produce a watered down plan; and

▪ Requiring genuine leadership that steers the planning committee to an effective, comprehensive plan that identifies & accounts for threats & weaknesses (as well as opportunities & strengths) … away from the idealistic, lowest common denominator plan.
PLANNING: A Process That Works …

- **Have a Committee Worthy to the Task:**
  - Thoughtful Members Open to Change …
    . . . Reflective, Thorough & Considerate
  - A Strong Chair … A Listener, Facilitator & Leader.

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PLANNING: A Workable Process (cont.) …

- **Have a Project Agenda:**
  - **Orient** the Committee & make a general call for suggestions
  - **Meet** with Committee members individually for suggestions
  - **Consolidate** ALL suggestions into a coherent report sent to Committee
  - **Meet** with Committee, review suggestions report & receive comments
  - **Prepare** first draft of Strategic Plan; send to Committee for review; then meet for corrections & comments
  - **Prepare** preliminary “final” draft of Plan and send to Committee, upper Administration & everyone in the university for review & comment … sought & received individually and then reviewed with Committee
  - **Prepare** “final” draft of Plan, with draft of accompanying report; send to Committee for review; then meet for corrections & comments
  - **Prepare** Committee’s Proposed Plan (“final” draft) & accompanying explanatory report; send to Committee & upper Administration for final review, sought & received individually (meet & tweak, if needed)
  - **Send** Proposed Plan to President, with Report (*incl.* any Minority Report).
PLANNING: A Workable Process (cont.) …

▪ **Everyone in the University Must Have an Opportunity to Share:** At least at the beginning & as the “final” draft is in process

▪ **All Upper Managers Must Have Individual Opportunities to Share:** From the President, in general, when the Committee receives its charge and from President, Vice Presidents & Deans/Directors along the way

▪ **Everyone on Committee Must Meaningfully Participate:** Individually, without peer pressure, & in committee

   *Always* in accord with the missions of institution & committee and bearing in mind any existing plan (to keep the good & lose the bad).
Strategic Planning:
Challenges and Solutions
by
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