

THE CONCEPT OF PLANNING IN
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Planning has always been a vital tool for the management of any organisation or institution. No body would doubt the place and importance of planning because it is the only source of direction for an organisation. Without it, the institution would always remain in the-dark and would not have any place to go especially as institutions operate in a vigorously changing environment. Thus, planning is necessitated by the basic fact that organisations operate in a changing environment, creating conditions of uncertainty in all but the simplest circumstances.

The place of planning can better be appreciated by recounting some well-known physical, structural or academic disasters caused by either poor planning or lack of planning. Well publicised disaster caused by poor or ineffective planning in the United State of America (USA) and Great Britain, in the '60s and '70s (Ross and Kami, 1973), have given the problem of planning a global dimension. Some Universities started multi-million naira projects only to abandon them midway. University of Port Harcourt's Multi-million Naira Auditorium Complex, which was abandoned in the '80s, is a case in point. The academic programs of some tertiary institutions have been abandoned for lack of planning. From the above case histories, it can be reasoned that planning shortcomings, with their attendant disasters are commonly found within the operational units of tertiary institutions

and other organisations. It therefore, becomes very paramount to x-ray the planning concept with a view to distilling lessons for an improved management of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Unfortunately, many organisational failures arising from planning have been attributed to lack of knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of planning. This chapter will unveil these fundamentals.

PLANNING: An Overview

Planning is as old as mankind and its development in the business and non-business circles has been as revolutionary a movement as technological revolution.

The dynamic nature of the working environment makes planning not only important but a *sine qua non* for the organisation's management efforts. Therefore, in designing an environment for the effective performance of individuals working together in groups, a chief executive officer's most essential task is to see that everyone clearly understands the group's purposes and objectives and its methods of attaining them. Again, the group's efforts can only be effective if people know what, how and when they are expected to accomplish them. This is the main function of planning, which has been known to be the basis for all managerial functions.

Planning has been defined by many authors. Incidentally, there has always been a tendency to give planning emotive connotations, particularly in the context of the controversy between individualism and collectivism. This approach tends to obscure the true meaning and purpose of the planning process. Ours here will circumvent this approach. Billy (1949), many years ago saw planning as "fundamentally choosing" and said that "a planning problem arises only when an alternative course of action is discovered". This definition ignores the futuristic characteristics of planning and therefore unacceptable. Comprehensively, Simon (1967), defined planning as "that activity that concerns itself with proposals for the future, with the evaluation of alternative proposals and with the methods by which these proposals may be achieved". Thus, planning is concerned with future human behaviour and involves two activities:

Ultimate activities which are those anticipated if a plan is carried out and

(ii) Intermediate activities which are those required to carry out the plan.

Essentially, planning involves selection of missions and objectives and possible means of achieving them. It is deciding in advance what to do, when to do and who is to do it. It bridges the gap from where we are to where we want to go. It makes it possible for things to occur which would not otherwise happen. Thus, the primary purpose of planning is to offset future uncertainties by reducing the risk surrounding the operations of the organisation while at the same time taking advantage of available opportunities. The manager's position in the planning process makes him assume a role somewhat akin to that of a fortuneteller but in this case, very scientific. Although the exact future can seldom be predicted and factors beyond control may interfere with the best-laid plans, unless there is planning, events are left to chance. Planning is an intellectually demanding process; it requires the conscious determination of courses of action and the basing of decisions on purpose, knowledge and considered estimates (Harold and Heinz, 1990). Planning is anchored in four principles namely: contribution to purpose and objectives, primary of planning, pervasiveness of planning and efficiency of plans.

Planning is indispensable to the institution administrative process as any decision and consequent activities carried out to achieve the objectives of that decision will limit the range of choices available to the administrator in future owing to the limited nature of resources. Principally, planning and controlling are closely inter-related as plans furnish the standards of control.

A number of different plans exist. Regrettably, most of our educational managers are either ignorant or negligent of their existence. This has obvious implication. There have been cases of ineffective planning among our tertiary institutions, which by spiral effect, make activities stagnant and performance very poor. It is easy to see that a major programme, such as one of building a students' hostel is a plan. But what is sometimes overlooked is that a number of other courses of future action are also plans. They differ in nature and scope and include: purposes or missions, objectives, strategies, policies, rules, procedures.

programmes, projects and budgets. Plans can also be classified from the viewpoint of functional areas e.g. Academic plans, physical plans, etc, or according to the period of time over which they are projected (short-versus long-range plans) or with respect to their frequency of use (standing versus single-use plans). Summary of standing and single-use plans is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Standing and Single-use Plans

Type	Definition	Example
Standing plans		
1. Policy	A general statement that guides decision making.	*Preference will be given to hiring of the handicapped*
2. Procedure	A series of related steps to be followed in an established order to achieve a given purpose.	*Travel expenses must be filled in for reimbursement*
3. Rule	A statement that either prescribes or prohibits action by specifying what an individual may or may not do in a specific situation.	*No eating at work stations*
Single Use Plans		
4. Budget	A plan that deals with the future allocations and utilization of various resources to different activities of an enterprise over a given time.	Allocation and utilization of machine hours.
5. Program	A plan typically intended to accomplish a specific objective within a fixed time.	Shuttle Program
6. Project	A subset or component part of a specific program.	

Source: Arthur G.B., Management, 2nd, ed., Chicago: The Dryden Press, 1989, p.116.

The Planning Process

We had earlier defined planning as a process of establishing enterprise objectives and selecting a future course of action for their accomplishment. To fully understand the planning function, it is better to look at the processes involved. Basically, five repetitive and interactive phases are recognised in (fig 1).

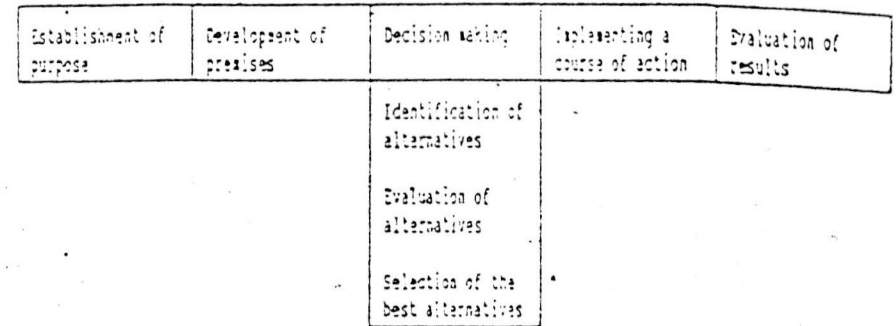


Fig. 1: Phases in the planning process

On each phase, an institution should look both ahead and back to determine how other phases affect implementation at a particular time. Again, they must study the feasibility of possible courses of action at each stage. For example, in establishing objectives, it is necessary to have some idea about the premises underlying the plans. An ambitious objective of increasing student intake by 50% in subsequent academic sessions may be unrealistic if the human and material requirements have not been properly put in place. This implies that the phases in the planning process must be considered simultaneously.

Phase 1. Establishing Objectives

The first phase in the planning process is the establishment of an institution's objectives or goals and that of its sub-units. They are an essential starting point since they provide direction for all other managerial activities. Objectives specify where we want to be and what we want to accomplish and when to accomplish

it. Before objectives are established, the manager should be aware of existing opportunities as this should form the basis of establishing any objective(s). For instance, Imo State University's decision to mount part-time degree programs in some disciplines is informed by opportunities existing within its surrounding environment.

Phase 2. Developing Premises

Once an institution's objectives have been determined, understood and stated, developing premises about the future environment in which they are to be accomplished is essential. This basically involves forecasting events or conditions likely to influence goal attainment. Premises, then, are planning assumptions. In other words, they constitute the expected environment of plans in operation. That is, in what environment, internal or external, will our plans operate?

Phase 3. Decision Making

This phase involves selecting the best course of action to be pursued from the possible alternatives. This best course of action selected should be able to accomplish stated objectives. This phase involves three steps:

- (1) Available alternatives are identified;
- (2) Each alternative is evaluated in light of premises about the future;
- (3) The alternative with the highest probability of success, provided it is within an institution's capabilities, is selected. It is at this final step that a plan of action is adopted and the climax of what is termed the decision-making process occurs.

Phase 4. Implementing a Course of Action

Once a plan of action has been adopted, appropriate action must be initiated to ensure its proper implementation. Plans alone are no guarantee of success. The best plans are worthless if they are improperly implemented and proper implementation requires managerial skill. This phase is the key to effective planning and very crucial to the institution's success.

As soon as the plan of action is adopted, detailed and workable provisions must be made for its implementation and all those who will be involved must be

informed and appropriate resources must be allocated. It has to be emphasized that sound implementation is, in every bit, as important as selecting an alternative from among available courses of action. In this regard, although we have identified implementation as an indispensable phase of planning, it is more fundamentally a feature of the entire management process. It is a basic aspect of each managerial function. The problem of implementation of plans can be seen as:

- (1) Managers resisting plans because they do not understand them;
- (2) Managers resisting plans because they haven't been sold to them.

Phase 5. Evaluating Results

This is an assessment of performance based on what is hoped to be achieved. Plans and their implementation must be subjected to constant evaluation. This phase is very critical in the success of the institution and it should take place at all managerial levels, from top manager to first-line officers. Both during and after implementation, follow-up and control in form of feedback is essential for effectiveness in plans as well as refining of future plans.

Evaluation enables managers to learn from experience and thus increase their capacity for developing future plans. No matter how careful and thorough an institution may be, deviations abound. Such deviations may be from forces internal or external to the institution.

So plans should not be seen in any way as static. There may be times when perceived opportunities do not materialise, objectives are unrealistic, planning premises are inaccurate, or the plan of action selected is inappropriate. These deviations can only be identified if and only if an evaluation of the entire process is carried out. It is important to stress here that managers should not consider themselves failures on seeing any of these deviations or variations. Rather, these variations should be considered as a normal but challenging managerial activity.

Why Plan?

The question, "why plan?", is easy to answer but at the same time demands some thorough answer. The place of planning in the life of any organisation or institution cannot be over-emphasized. An institution without plan is like a

christian without Christ. The only thing he can be sure of is eternal death. Essentially, institutions plan for four basic reasons itemised below.

- (1) Planning helps institutions succeed. "ceteris paribus" (all things being equal).
- (2) Planning provides direction and a sense of purpose.
- (3) Planning helps managers cope with change.
- (4) Planning contributes to the performance of other managerial functions.

Why Managers Resist Planning

Despite the windfalls of planning to the institution and the fact that managers possess the skills and foresight necessary for effective planning, they still resist it. Arthur (1989) stated a number of reasons as follows:

- (a) Managers have many functions to perform, and planning is only one of several activities competing for their attention.
- (b) Managers prefer to act on immediate problems because they provide instant feedback. If manager (Director) helps a contractor to secure a local purchase order (LPO), the contractor's thanks are given now. Planning deals with future events, and its rewards are deferred.
- (c) Good planning is hard work.
- (d) Plans can be used to measure result, and sometimes managers do not want anyone else to know that their plans were poorly devised or could not be accomplished.
- (e) Planning often involves serious thinking and extensive paper-work, activities most managers do not like. In fact, one study found that corporate executives spend only 10 to 15 percent of their time thinking (Arthur, 1984). Managers tend to be doers.
The long period of reflection and thought required for good planning can be painful for people who strive on a fast pace.
- (f) Planning takes time. It is best done as a separate activity when few interruptions are likely to occur. It may be necessary to find hideaways and private moments for planning. Many managers are reluctant to make this effort.

No reason can be given by any manager for not planning. Non-planners are always faced with high probability of misfortune or failure, which they blame on bad luck.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning and planning can be contrasted. While we have been discussing the latter from an operational perspective which tends to be inward-looking, focusing on more direct aspect of the institution, the former focuses on the institution's long-term relationship to its environment. Strategic plan or Grand strategy as it is sometime called, serves to define the overall character, mission and direction of an institution or enterprise. On focusing on the institution as a total system, strategic planning recognises that all institutions face many uncontrollable elements within their environments. Thus, it is concerned with shaping an institution or enterprise in the accomplishment of its set goals.

Strategic planning is primarily developed by top management. But managerial positions with strategic planning responsibility are by no means restricted to a few senior officers; in an organisation of much size and complexity like our tertiary institutions, there are strategy managers up and down the management hierarchy. The strategy planning function directly involves all managers with line authority at the various levels of management. It should not be a high-level staff function performed by professionals who then handover the Chief Executive Officer - approved plans to others to carry out in their respective areas of responsibility. Rather, the strategy-making/strategy-executing tasks need to fall directly into the laps of those managers who run those parts of the organisation where strategic results must be achieved. This creates room for accommodation of pluralistic views if only to achieve strategic success and reduce chances of failure.

There are many strategic managers in a typical tertiary institution. For example, in a well established university, the Vice Chancellor is a strategy manager with broad direction-setting responsibility and strategic decision-making authority over the entire University. The Provost in charge of a college is a strategy manager with strategy-making and strategy-implementing authority over all academic, student and budgetary, programming and coordination responsibilities for the whole

college.

The Deans of the various faculties are strategy managers with direction-setting leadership responsibility for the academic programmes, budgets, students in the faculty, etc. The heads of the various academic departments are strategy managers with first-line strategic and supervisory responsibility for the departmental budget, the department's undergraduate and post-graduate programme offerings, students in the department, etc. Heads of non-academic departments are strategy managers with strategy-planning/strategy implementation roles.

Managerial jobs with strategy-planning/strategy-implementation roles are thus quite numerous and common. The need to understand the ins and outs of strategic planning and to be skilled in strategy thinking, formal strategy analysis, annual strategy reviews and methods of strategy execution is a basic aspect of managing and is not something that only top managers need to know and to worry about. In short, what strategic planning is and what it involves is something every manager and would-be managers need to know about. This is because of its significant place in the survival and growth of the institution. Research has shown that thorough strategy analysis and effective strategy management practices have a positive impact on organisation performances (Stanley House, 1970 and William 1980).

Essentially, managers derive a lot of benefits from engaging in strategic planning. Thomas A.A. and Strickland (1987) outlined the advantages of first rate strategic thinking and a deep commitment to the strategic management process to include:

- (1) The guidance it provides to the entire management hierarchy in making just clear "what it is we are trying to do and to achieve?;
- (2) The contribution it makes to recognising and responding to the winds of change, new opportunities and threatening developments;
- (3) The rationale it provides for management in evaluating competing requests for investment capital and new staff;
- (4) The co-ordination it adds to all the strategy-related decision making done by managers across the organisation;
- (5) The practice instead of reactive posture that it gives to the organisation.

The fifth advantage is of absolute importance, as most managers (Chief Executive Officer, Directors, etc), in the recent decades, just react and defend managerial issues rather than initiate and lead with a powerful strategy. This has continued to mar the progress of the institutions. It is a well-known fact that high performing institutions or enterprises deliberately try to impact their market targets with a powerful, opportunistic strategy; they like to initiate and lead and not just react and defend.

In their views, the real purpose and value of strategy is to come up with an action plan that will, among other things, influence the direction of industry change in their favour and push performance to superior levels - a standard for industry comparison.

It is important to state here that the best method to a result-oriented strategic planning is the WOTS UP Analysis which is the assessment and diagnosis of an enterprise's (institution's) strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats for planning purposes. WOTS UP Analysis are acronyms for weaknesses, opportunities, threats, strengths, and underlying planning. Its purpose is to:

- (1) Establish an enterprise's distinctive competencies
- (2) Identify available opportunities (market niche) for future growth.

REASONS FOR INEFFECTIVE PLANNING

A manager's efforts in ensuring an effective Planning have sometimes been thwarted by factors internal and/or external to his working environment. Sometimes, he is responsible for his ineffectiveness. Koontz et al (1972) identified a number of reasons itemised as follows:

- (1) Lack of commitment to planning.
- (2) Confusion of Planning studies with Plans
- (3) Failure to develop and implement sound strategies.
- (4) Lack of meaningful objectives or goals.
- (5) Tendency to under-estimate the importance of planning premises,
- (6) Failure to see the scope of plans.
- (7) Failure to see planning as a rational process.
- (8) Excessive reliance on experience,
- (9) Failure to use the principle of the limiting factor.
- (10) Lack of top management support,

- (11) Lack of clear delegation.
- (12) Lack of adequate control techniques and information.
- (13) Resistance to change.
- (14) Failure to review and evaluate long - range plans that have been developed by department and divisional heads.
- (15) Creating a planning program that lacks flexibility and simplicity and fails to encourage creativity.

LIMITATIONS OF EFFECTIVE PLANNING

We have seen from above some of the practical difficulties encountered in planning. A manager's planning skill may be good yet his planning efforts may not be realised for reasons of planning limitations. These limitations should not scare and discourage managers in their planning efforts, rather their awareness can help in equipping their adaptation skill as well as remove many of the frustrations in effective planning. Effective planning limitations include:

Difficulty of accurate premises

Problem of rapid change

Internal inflexibility

Externally imposed inflexibility

Time and expense.

SUMMARY

The place of planning is seen as very crucial and its adoption as a management tool identified as necessitated by the main fact that all enterprises, organisations and institutions operate in a dynamic environment. Planning involves selection of missions and objectives necessary for their achievement. It can take various forms: purposes or missions, objectives, strategies, policies, rules, procedures, projects, and budgets. It can also be classified on the basis of functional areas, according to the period of time over which they are projected or with respect to the frequency of use. Planning as a process involves five phases: Establishing objectives, Developing premises, Decision-making, Implementing a course of action and Evaluation of results. Each of these phases is considered simultaneously.

The reason for planning are seen as benefits accruing therefrom and reasons for the resistance to planning by managers ranges from, managers having many functions to perform, to time involved in planning.

Planning and strategic planning (Grand Strategy) are distinguished. While the former is inward-looking, the latter is outward-looking, focusing on an enterprise's or institution's long-term relationship to its environment and serving to define its overall character, mission and direction. The best method to having a result-oriented strategic plan is the WOTS UP Analysis which is the assessment and diagnosis of an institution's or enterprise's strengths and weaknesses, as well as, opportunities and threats for planning purposes.

Reasons for ineffective planning ranges from lack of commitment to planning, to creating a planning programme that lacks flexibility and simplicity. Apart from these reasons, effective planning is limited by a number of factors including difficulty in accurate premises, problem of rapid change, internal and external, inflexibility and time and expense involved in the planning process.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning is an indispensable tool in the entire management process. It is the main determinant of the institution's success or failure. Yet the level of attention given to it by management at various levels of the institution gives cause for concern. This negative attitude has been attributed to factors and limitations outlined in the paper, on one hand and to factors incidental in nature, on the other hand. However, they can be improved upon by objectively implementing the following recommendations:

Environment conducive to effective planning must be established and sustained; Planning should start at the top and the support of other managers and subordinates sort;

Empirical and objective forecasting of possible changes, internal and external to the institution, should be carried out at the various stages of the planning process; Planning is a means to an end and therefore no institution should spend more, in terms of time and money, on planning than the expected benefits;

Planning must be organised.

Managers should not assume anything in the planning process except it is scientifically based.

Various aspects of the plan must be effectively communicated to those already in the process and those to be integrated in the future.

Planning must be definite.

Resources necessary for effective planning must be made available to the appropriate officers concerned and in time too.

Always start with a good idea.

Obtain employee commitment and involvement.

Develop an implementation plan.

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