Book Reviews

Cope (Robert G.) *Opportunity from Strength: Strategic Planning Clarified with Case Examples*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, College Station, Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1987, 134 p. (\$10.00)
ISBN 0-913317-43-8

Institutional Planning is the continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of taking informed decisions affecting the future. As W.G. Bennis stated in *The Planning of Change*, back in 1969, 'Whatever else planning may mean, it signifies anticipation of some future state of affairs and the confirmation of the vision of that future in the present in order to motivate, guide and direct present action'. The simple philosophy of planning is relatively constant but the aims, emphases, styles and methods of institutional planning in higher education vary considerably over time according to environmental changes and pressures, the extent of internal cohesion, the quality and status of the institution and its professional staff, and so on — a range of variety which is compounded by the propensity of commentators to invent their own frames of reference and terminologies for analysis and description. The intending practitioner is faced with a confusing array of literature, much of which erects theories and projects models from a too narrow base of practice.

The value of this helpfully compact book is that it fulfils its subtitle successfully and succinctly. The heart of the book is the summary of the application of strategic planning in recent years in a sizeable number of institutions of higher education in the USA which represent a broad mix of types of universities and colleges. The section of the book dealing directly with the case examples is a rich source of ideas and practical hints which should be read by anyone in higher education interested in how to position and progress his or her institution — in other words, a very wide audience, especially given one of the essential features of strategic planning.

I refer to the feature concerning the education and involvement of the members of the institution. Member participation was an essential element in the planning creed of the late 1960s, closely related to the democratization of governance at that time, but another part of that creed was that external change was predictable, its impact could be permissive, and the process was dominated by internalities. The harsh decade from the mid-1970s wiped out those assumptions, and led to corporate planning becoming a process whereby the leadership, aware of external realities, manipulated the institution into the key decisions leaving the collegiality to concentrate upon production and impotent verbal opposition to the environmental forces of change. Having lived through that maelstrom, strategic planning now asserts the importance of educating internal members about external trends and pressures in order that their expertise and experience can contribute to the forward planning of the institution. The vision and skills of the leadership remain the key essential for effective strategic planning, for the creation of an institutional philosophy which positions the university in society in order to maximize perceived opportunities, but without the ideas and involvement of informed staff even the best leaders cannot sustain strategic planning as a long-term process.

The book also contains a thorough summary of the relevant literature and an outline of the development of institutional planning which is excellent. It illustrates how planning has returned to the management mainstream. There are many, mainly outside North America, who still think of planning as a specialist activity resulting in the technocratic production of fixed plans governed by computer models. This book will help those many university

officers to appreciate that planning is more about creating an institutional philosophy and a commitment to it, and ensuring that appropriate information and experience, external and internal, are brought to bear in routine decision-taking.

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