

## 6. A CASE STUDY IN INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING\*

### Introduction

This case study examines the substantial efforts which have been made by one college of advanced education in the area of institutional planning and organisational development. The methodology of the case study is briefly outlined and the characteristics of the college are described. The planning and development activities of the college are described in detail. The issues faced by the college are examined. For example, the environment for innovation is considered in terms of the role of key people and the situations and problems faced prior to the innovations and the impetus for innovation. The staff development for acceptance of the innovations is examined. Finally an evaluation is made of the innovations at the college and some conclusions are drawn from the case study.

### The Methodology of the Case Study

This case study was undertaken to illustrate certain issues in planning and development. College A was particularly suitable for study because its management had demonstrated an awareness and an understanding of many of the issues which appear in the planning literature. While the changes achieved to date at College A do not represent the implementation of a full planning model, College A is probably in the forefront of planning innovation in Australia.

For the purposes of the case study, a range of documentation was collected and analysed and an extensive set of interviews was undertaken.

The aim in conducting the interviews was to discover the events which had taken place, the problems which had arisen and the extent of participation in the planning process. Therefore, it was necessary firstly to interview senior management as they were most likely to have the best knowledge of the events and secondly to interview middle level and junior staff in order to gauge the extent of participation in the planning process.

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In order to arrange a suitable range of interviews, the chief executive of College A was given a list of the type of staff who seemed most appropriate for interview and the chief executive then selected the particular individuals. However, during the interview process at College A, several other staff members were suggested by interviewees as worthy of being interviewed and these staff members were also interviewed.

A total of twelve interviews were undertaken at College A and the interviewees included: the chief executive (director), two deputy directors (in office at different periods), an acting dean of a school, an associate dean, two programme heads, a lecturer, the head of a service division, the Registrar, the senior financial officer and the President of the Academic Staff Association.

#### College A - Institutional Characteristics

The college has been in existence for approximately ten years and is located on the edge of a large country city (population approximately 80,000 people). Student enrolment is approximately 3,000 equivalent full-time students. The schools within the college are engineering, applied science, business, arts and teacher education.

When staff were asked to describe the features of the college, the answers invariably referred to the regional nature of the college. There was wide agreement that the college existed to serve the large rural region in which it was located. In fact, the college serves an area much larger than its region. Due to a considerable involvement in external studies, the college had students spread over a large part of Australia.

Other characteristics of the college as seen by the staff include:

1. a strong vocational emphasis in the curricula;
2. a unique organisational structure (which will be discussed later);
3. a high proportion (approximately 50 per cent) of students who are external students;
4. a substantial involvement in continuing education;
5. aggressive leadership at the helm of the college.

The administrative structure of the college is unique and the process by which the structure was achieved will be described in greater detail later in this case study. As a result of an organisational review, departments were abolished and a programme structure was introduced.

The college consists of a number of schools, and each school is led by a dean. In each school there are three positions of associate dean, i.e.

## INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

1. associate dean (academic)
2. associate dean (personnel)
3. associate dean (resources).

The practice has been for the dean to carry responsibility for one of the three associate dean positions, so that there are in fact only two associate deans in each school.

A programme consists of one or more awards (a degree, a diploma etc.). For example, a programme may consist of one or more awards in electrical engineering. Each programme is led by a programme head. The programme heads were described as being "responsible for getting the best possible programme of studies for the students" and "for student progress". On the other hand, the programme head was described as "not responsible for finance, course planning and review, or staffing".

These latter areas were described as "the responsibility of the dean". For example, one interviewee stated, "In the programme structure, control of personnel is taken by the dean, rather than by the programme head."

The programme concept at this college involves a system of contracting in which academic staff make offers to teach in any programme of the college. While top management see the system as emphasising "individual responsibility with required consultation", one interviewee observed that "the programme concept has led to a strong degree of vagueness in belonging". This is a reference to the fact that staff no longer belong to a department which is based on a discipline.

In considering models for institutional planning, an important consideration is the style of the institutional leadership and the involvement of the leadership in the planning process. The institutional leadership tends to be synonymous with the person of the chief executive, although this depends on how dominant a role the chief executive plays.

In this college, the dominant role of the chief executive is without doubt. The situation was reflected by one interviewee who stated, "The chief executive makes this place different. He has got a very pronounced leadership style. It could be called an authoritarian style. The place has developed because of that". Another observer stated, "The chief executive is the decision maker. There is a fair amount of consultation, but there is one decision maker within a school and one within the college". When describing the college leadership style, words frequently used were authoritarian and autocratic. However, some observers saw a change over the last two to three years towards "a collegiate style of management", with "more people now involved in the decision making process". Other observers saw no change in the leadership style, but rather, an entrenchment of the earlier style.

The college has devoted substantial effort to a consideration of the aims of the college. This is illustrated by the fact that it is one of the few colleges in Australia, if not the only college, to have developed a mission statement. The mission statement appears in the college handbook.

The Developments in Planning and Development at College A

The college undertook an organisational review towards the end of the 1970s. Subsequent to the review, a new organisational structure was established, a mission statement was developed and a new basis for resource allocation was introduced. In addition, some preliminary attempts were being made at institutional evaluation during the early 1980s.

The relationship between the reorganisation and the planning system of College A was described by one senior staff member as follows: "One has fallen out of the other. We reorganised the place, we set a mission, we set an organisation to meet identified needs falling out of that mission and set up our planning and review system which fell out of that".

An Organisational Review Committee (ORC) was established and this Committee met frequently. The ORC received reports from external consultants and from schools within the college. Surveys of community attitudes towards the college were conducted. Within the individual schools, other committees examined the activities of those particular schools. The College Council was kept informed on the organisational review although the Council was not involved with the methodology of the review. A senior staff member stated, "Council set the general parameters - efficiency and effectiveness - as the goals we had to aim at".

The mission statement of the college was described by staff as "a statement of where we ought to be going", and as "a statement of direction". A number of the interviewees saw the development of the mission statement as a consequence of overseas study undertaken by the chief executive. One interviewee stated, "the chief executive did a doctorate in educational administration - that is what led to it /the mission statement/ - he got very much into the whole notion of planning, organisation of resources, rationalisation, alternative models etc. The Registrar of the time did a similar study at the same place - so you had two of the senior administrators who were interested in organisational change".

While these experiences may have led to the production of the mission statement, it also appears that the mission statement was a by-product of the organisational review. This is illustrated in the words of one senior staff member who said, "It /the mission statement/ really fell out of the organisational review. The first question was asked, organisation for what? And we had to have some guiding principles".

In the light of the above and in light of other comments made, there is no doubt that the chief executive was the driving force behind the production

## INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

of the mission statement. This heavy involvement of the chief executive in an important part of an institutional planning process is significant. The literature on planning lays great stress on the importance of such involvement by the chief executive.

While the chief executive was the driving force in the production of the mission statement, there were inputs from various sources including, to varying degrees, Council members and staff, plus inputs from surveys of the community, professional groups and students.

The interviewees showed a high degree of awareness of the mission statement. Acceptance of the mission statement appeared to be strongest amongst senior academic staff and less strong amongst non-academic staff and junior academic staff.

The allocation of staff resources within the college is described as being on a needs basis. For example it was stated that, "we determine needs through determining teaching programme needs - then we allocate existing staff members to those needs on a preference/bid to teach system. When we find deficiencies, we obtain new staff or retrain existing staff". The basis of the system is the needs of the programme and offers to teach which can be made by an academic to any programme in the college.

For the allocation of equipment resources, there exists a College Resources Group which contains representatives from all major areas of the college. The College Resources Group is an advisory committee to the chief executive. The group includes the associate dean (resources) from each school plus senior financial officers of the college. The deans of the schools make bids to this group for equipment by project. A project, such as an accounting laboratory, is funded, rather than a particular item of equipment. The projects are given a priority for funding, by the College Resources Group.

The emphasis in the resource allocation process, is on demonstrated need and in no way is there a use of historical/incremental approaches.

Senior staff of the college appeared to be well aware of the importance of evaluation but the efforts in this area were only in the early stages. The college had recently established a College Review Committee to act as an evaluation team, under the chairmanship of the deputy director.

### The Issues for College A - the Environment for Innovation

A number of factors in the environment of the college were seen as leading to the organisational review and associated developments. These factors include:

1. demographic changes, including an increase in the proportion of adult students and an increase in the proportion of external students;

2. concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the departmental structure of the college;
3. a view that there was a need for systematic planning which would increase efficiency and effectiveness in the college;
4. a recognition that growth (in higher education) was to cease and therefore the operations of the college would change. One senior staff member stated, "We recognised that things were going to become difficult for higher education. The general policy of the Council was one of efficiency. How does one do that? Well you look at your structure".

Probably as important, if not more important, than any of the above-mentioned environmental factors was the positive role of the chief executive. The influence of the chief executive was described by one staff member as follows, "If the chief executive hadn't been as forceful in insisting that it go through, it could easily not have occurred because there was strong opposition in various areas and there was strong opposition to some of the recommendations, for example, the revised structure".

Some of the staff believe that the ideas implemented at the college have their source in the university where the chief executive undertook his studies. Other staff members believe that the ideas had no particular source or that the ideas were very much locally developed. There is some truth in each of these beliefs. The situation is best illustrated in the words of the chief executive. When asked whether there was any one institution which gave him the ideas that had been implemented at the college, he at first said no and then said, "I guess the answer is yes and the university /\_where I studied\_/ is that place, but not in the sense that it gave me a model. I was appalled by the lack of planning /\_at that university\_/ . They had all sorts of models but nothing was integrated and I could see the reason for that. There was no commitment at the top. That university showed that if you are going to have any sort of planning model, it must be one that is integrated, which has a degree of commitment from the senior staff and which is not to be used for internal political purposes".

The college did not provide a formal programme of staff development for the innovations which took place. The absence of a programme was seen by some staff as a contributing factor to the resistance which developed amongst some of the staff.

However, while there was no formal pre-preparation, many staff saw "the whole exercise as being an important staff development activity". Training was seen as being provided through participation. Staff had the opportunity to attend numerous meetings and various documents were issued for comment. In summary, it could be said that rather than having staff development for the innovations, there was staff development available through participation in the process of innovation.

## INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

### An Evaluation of the Innovations at College A

In favour of the innovations there were arguments which relate to new attitudes amongst the staff, improved structure, improved decision making and better allocation of resources. New attitudes are reflected in such statements as "A lot of people are now in a review frame of mind and that is an achievement for the organisation" and "the principle benefit was raising people's awareness of the need for significant endeavour in these areas - it required people at all levels to do a lot of thinking". In the opinion of one senior staff member, "the greatest success is that we are now starting to get a degree of commitment for planning right down to the individual staff member. For example, the Staff Professional Profile structure is leading to a degree of commitment". The Staff Professional Profile is a document which may be completed annually by a staff member and it describes the staff member's proposed professional activities for the coming year.

The programme structure is seen as successful in terms of the students' interests. It was stated that, "the students can clearly identify with a student-oriented Programme Head". Another benefit arising out of the new structure was the creation of "centres". These centres are multi-disciplinary groups of academics who work on a particular topic. It was suggested that the setting up of the centres had encouraged more applied research.

There was a feeling that the decision making process had been clarified and that decisions were being made by smaller groups. It was stated for example, that "you can identify the people who are responsible for decisions". The decisions may not always have been popular but it seems clear that decisions are now made by more clearly identified individuals.

Finally, on the favourable side, there appears to be greater flexibility in the allocation of resources. Thus it was stated "it is much easier to re-direct resources".

As against these favourable aspects, there were a number of unfavourable aspects. The unfavourable aspects may be summarised as: excessive concern with structure, the influence of political considerations, problems of participation and the lack of a suitable model for planning.

The concentration on structure was illustrated by the following observations: "I was concerned that the organisational framework was coming up first", "The problems of the college were classified on a grid - then it was announced that we were only interested in one of the nine elements of the grid i.e. the college and (its) structure", "It ended up by merely dealing with structural tinkering in terms of organisation and management of the system and it left out a whole host of other areas, not the least of which was the quality of the staff/student interface - it only addressed itself to structural elements" and "The planning effort has concentrated on one of the nine elements in a corporate plan".

Planning is a political process and the importance of political

considerations were illustrated by such statements as, "I was concerned that the College Committee Review which was responsible for the planning, had vested interests in the outcome of the planning" and "there were hidden agendas in the planning process i.e. if you are planning for change, people are going to try and maximise their own benefit. This was partly overcome by bringing in the visiting teams who were skilled in organisational development".

The literature on planning suggests that if planning is to be successful, it should be widely participative. However, the achievement of widespread participation can be difficult and to some extent, this was a problem at College A. For example it was stated that "there has been a problem in getting feedback from staff - most comes from a few people".

Probably the most significant weakness in the innovations was either the lack of a suitable model for planning, or the lack of agreement on the model and the sharing of understanding on the content of the model. It was clear that a few senior staff had an understanding of a model which they believed the college was using. However this information had apparently not been generally shared. The situation was summarised by one senior staff member who said, "We have yet to develop satisfactorily a planning model. We have yet to develop a clear understanding, particularly amongst senior staff, of the precise nature of long-term planning. The facts of the matter are that we haven't yet developed a model for long-term planning".

### Conclusions Arising from the Innovations at College A

#### Models

This case study has illustrated that it is important that an institution should have an agreed model for planning and development, that the content of the model should be widely understood and that due attention should be given to carrying out each stage of the model. At College A there were at least a few members of senior management who had a clear idea in their own mind as to what constituted an appropriate model. The activities of the college suggest that over time, efforts were being made to implement one or more models. It is not entirely clear that there was a single, generally agreed and detailed model. The case study suggests that there is a risk of excessive concentration on one part of a model to the possible exclusion of other parts of the model.

The existence of a model at College A is suggested by the following two statements made independently by two of the most senior staff of the college. It will be recalled however, that another equally senior member of staff has been quoted previously as saying that the college lacked a model.

"There is a model which we are using. It includes:

environment

## INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

assumptions

objectives - definition of, quantification of

activities

selection amongst activities

implementation of activities

assignment of responsibilities

evaluation

outcome identification."

The second statement which suggested the existence of a model was as follows,

"Planning is an essential part of the college's work. It has to be structured planning and it has got to be structured around:

a statement of purpose

a statement of activity

implementation of that activity

and review of that activity

- the classic planning steps. They work."

The above comments have related to models. However, it is interesting to note that in the eyes of the staff, the model or lack of a model, was not really an issue. Other matters took a higher priority in their minds, as illustrated by the following comment, "The model wasn't under attack. The implementation and the outcomes of the model were under attack".

### Some Elements of a Model

It is difficult to place a value on the existence of a mission statement, but such a statement seems to be a useful element in a model for planning and development. There was certainly evidence at College A of a high degree of awareness of the mission statement and it appeared that the mission statement was a useful point of reference for senior staff.

A fundamental element in a model for planning and development is evaluation. It seems essential that if, for example, the success of the institution is to be assessed, some form of evaluation should take place. Evaluation is one of the final stages in a model for planning and development and there is a likelihood, as happened at College A, that it will be one of

the last activities to be undertaken. The important point is that it should happen and that it should be part of the model.

#### The Role of the Chief Executive

The literature on planning lays great stress on the need for the chief executive to be involved in the planning process and to be enthusiastic about planning. While this case study has dealt more with organisational planning and implementation than with strategic planning, there is clear evidence of the importance of the involvement and enthusiasm of the chief executive. Such organisational change as occurred at College A, could only have occurred because of the role played by the chief executive.

#### Participation

The literature on planning also stresses the value of wide participation in planning. The experience of College A suggests that wide participation may be difficult to achieve, in spite of extensive opportunity being given for participation. Participation brings with it expectations by the participants that the final outcome or decisions will match their wishes. This is often not to be, and so disappointment and even bitterness may result. The changes at College A certainly resulted in a range of reactions amongst the staff, sometimes accompanied by strong feelings of opposition. Those who seek to produce change must be prepared to accept that feelings and emotions will be roused.

During a period of change, the parties affected will naturally seek to protect their own interests. While participation by the parties affected is desirable, there is also a role for independent parties, such as visiting experts, who can bring a more objective view to the situation.

#### Staff Development for Change

The very process of change may constitute a staff development experience. However, consideration should be given to the provision of formal preparation before the change process begins. This preparation may improve the quality of the participation and may reduce the opposition which the change will produce.

The shortcomings in our knowledge of change are well illustrated in the following statement which was made by a senior staff member of College A, "Unfortunately, the literature is not strong enough on the difficulties that arise. The sheer inbuilt inertia, the behaviour of people in organisations - people are obsessed with their power, authority, security and prestige. We are not going to get very far unless we integrate the difficulties and oppositions into the planning process".