

Chapter IV

Planning in the Music Unit

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The Importance of Planning

Because it is basic to virtually everything else of importance, planning is one of our most important managerial tasks. Viewed in simple terms, planning may be seen as making the most appropriate choices among various alternatives. Because it forms the basis for making day-to-day operational decisions, the “plan” provides direction that makes it possible to operate smoothly and efficiently in accomplishing our larger purposes. Planning contributes to a *proactive* operational behavior, as opposed to bumping around in reaction to vague, unpredictable external forces. It puts the administrator in control.

As the term is used here, planning refers to long-range or long-term planning, or as it is most often identified, “*strategic planning*.” The music executive often has an opportunity to enter into review of mission and goals, which are the foundation for any planning exercise, as they pertain to the future of the music unit. This process might occur when the institution requests that the unit provide a statement regarding its future plans, which often happens along with a change of administration, such as a new president, provost, or dean. The review can also arise out of a change in the music unit’s leadership or of the process of accreditation or reaccreditation when a “self-study” is required. The music executive should be sure to fully review the current situation with the faculty before developing new plans as needed.

Another often-overlooked opportunity for planning occurs during facility construction or renovation. Building projects can be used as much more than a chance to collect a wish list of square footage or other needs; rather, the music unit should seriously discuss and evaluate how the facilities should support programs and what kind of teaching will take place in the various components of these facilities, so that the unit can realize its overall goals. Obviously, it would be ill advised to build or renovate facilities that when completed do no more than support an outdated mission or questionable programs.

The music executive should take advantage of any of these or other opportunities that provide a purpose for mobilizing faculty and staff in a serious planning exercise. Such a process also allows faculty that have been appointed since the last formal planning occurred to have input into the future of the music unit. Planning should also include students and alumni, who often can bring a perspective that could prove to be important to future considerations.

Elements of Planning

Although the terminology utilized may vary among different institutions, most successful strategic plans have in common the following five elements, which are usually considered in this order: (1) vision, (2) mission, (3) planning assumptions, (4) strategic goals, and (5) objectives.

Vision is about what we wish to *be*. How *good* can we be? How are we *positioned*? That is, with whom or with what institutions do we wish to be compared? Effective statements of vision are typically concise, usually limited to two or three sentences. The leader of the enterprise—in this case, the music executive—usually initiates vision. Wherever it originates, the vision must be understood and shared by everyone involved, including college and university administrators.

Mission is not the same thing as vision, even though the two terms are often used interchangeably. Vision, as noted above, is about what we wish to *be*. Mission is about what we wish to *do*. What is the nature of our product? Whom do we wish to serve? Mission statements are generally a bit longer than those about vision, but they still should be fairly concise, generally consisting of only a paragraph or two. It could be said that both vision and mission are more easily understood than articulated. Thus, the faculty generally agrees quickly and easily on the content of vision and mission, but they may battle endlessly on the language used to describe them.

Both the vision and mission statements should be sufficiently focused so that they relate to the uniqueness of the enterprise. They should also be sufficiently general to permit at least some latitude. A good test of both statements is the following pair of questions: Does the statement adequately and accurately describe our enterprise? Does it adequately and accurately describe what is unique about the music unit's vision and purpose?

Planning assumptions, sometimes called “landscape assessment” or “environmental scanning,” are an important early step in the planning process. Planning assumptions identify those conditions and forces—those internal and external variables—that may have an impact on the plan. Examples of internal assumptions might include institutional priorities; financial, physical, and human resources; facilities; and so on. External assumptions might include local, state, or national economic circumstances, or demographic trends and projections (e.g., the number of students who will enter college during the planning period, the number who might enter the music program, projected demand for a proposed new program).

The beginning of the planning exercise is an appropriate time to make an assessment of the present state of the music unit and all of its components. One should not be surprised to find that the various constituencies involved in such an assessment may view the present situation from quite different perspectives. Thus, before planning for the future one should be sure to fully understand the present. The SWOT model, which came from the business world, now appears as a frequently used model for higher education. This exercise is meant to identify the unit's Strengths and Weaknesses as well as its Opportunities and Threats. A SWOT assessment should take into consideration factors that are internal to the music unit, which are its Strengths (e.g., facilities) and Weaknesses (e.g., insufficient staff support), and those external factors, known as Opportunities (e.g., a supportive institutional administration) and Threats (e.g., a highly competitive student recruiting environment). The areas of the music unit considered for assessment should be consistent in all four SWOT categories focusing on each area of instruction, such as studio instruction, music education, ensembles, music theory, and so forth. The SWOT analysis should provide a profile of the

music unit's present position in regard to the institution, the region, and even the nation as a whole. It can also provide the basis for developing strategies in pursuit of opportunities, overcoming weaknesses, and minimizing the effects of external challenges.

Many possible sources of information exist as the basis of planning assumptions. Most colleges and universities have an office and/or designated individuals responsible for "institutional research," which has to do with analyzing statistical records and information that can identify trends or point to potential problems. Departmental records can sometimes provide the same kind of data. Government agencies, such as state departments of education, serve as a good source of information. Professional publications, such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, often report on national trends.

One of the most useful sources of information for the music executive is the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS), a project of the four arts accrediting organizations for music, art and design, theater, and dance, respectively. For example, the annual HEADS "Data Summaries" report, based on annual reports from member institutions, provides statistical information about such topics as faculty salaries, enrollment patterns, and expenses of the music unit. Organized and presented by size and type of institution (public or private), the report provides useful and comprehensive information and serves as an invaluable tool in planning. All administrators can find out more about the HEADS report by going to the NASM web site at www.arts-accredit.org.

Some of the information included in the planning assumptions will be factual, some will be judgmental, some reflective, and some projective. All of it will be intended to provide a realism against which strategic goals can be measured.

Strategic goals identify, in general terms, what we wish to accomplish in specific areas of planning, such as curriculum, enrollment, budget, facilities, and so on. Goals should be consistent with, and informed by, the vision and mission, and they should be realistic when measured against the planning variables. From time to time, it is possible to have no goals, or several, for each of the planning areas. A list of typical planning areas, sometimes called a "planning agenda," follows. There may, of course, be others but these are the most common:

- Curriculum and Programs
- Teaching
- Enrollment Management
- Budget and Finances
- Facilities and Equipment
- Faculty and Staff
- Student Life
- Community Engagement
- Planning and Assessment
- Advancement

Objectives serve to quantify goals. They answer such questions as Who? How many? By when? Sometimes these questions are addressed specifically in a so-called Action Plan that accompanies the objectives.

Characteristics of a Good Plan

While the length of a planning period, that is, the length of time to be covered by the plan, is arbitrary, five years seems to work well in many cases. A shorter period may not allow sufficient time for the plan to develop. Over a longer period, the forecasting associated with planning assumptions may become invalid.

Good plans are *adaptable*. They should be responsive to changing circumstances, new information, and experience. They should also be *realistic*. It is good to stretch—to “set the bar high,” so to speak. But if the plan seems unrealistic or unattainable, it will not gain acceptance or engender the broad effort needed for success.

Strategic planning is really an extension of strategic thinking. It is about seeing the “big picture,” taking the “long view.” These things are important, but they are not enough. It is not enough just to see beyond the horizon; one must be able to *make connections* between all the things to be seen out there. What is the relationship between budget and curriculum? between curriculum and staffing? between staffing and facilities? That is the strategic view.

It should be stressed that effective planning is *institution-specific*. Thus, any plan must be realistic in regard to the resources needed for its implementation and the amount of central administrative support that can or will be committed by the given institution. The music administrator should remember that both the goals that are being set and the time frame for the plan must be attainable in their institution’s given situation. The plan should be related to the music unit’s and the institution’s reward systems, in such areas as tenure, promotion, faculty or program support funding, and general recognition of individuals or academic areas.

Challenges to an Effective Planning Exercise

Since a planning exercise will require a good deal of commitment on the part of all involved, the music executive must keep in mind some of the most critical items that will affect the immediate and long-term outcome of strategic planning. Some of these have already been mentioned, but it is worth reminding the music executive of their critical role in the success of the plan.

Support comes from many areas of administrative responsibility. Some will be directly under the music executive’s control; others will need to be provided by others in the chain of command. Thus, all constituencies must “buy into” the planning and be prepared to support the outcomes agreed upon. A common mistake is underestimating the fiscal support that each area of the plan will require. Such an error could necessitate the reallocation of budget or faculty positions, either of which can have a demoralizing effect on people if they have not realized the consequences of the plans.

Institutions in higher education, especially public ones, can often experience cycles of restricted funding. For this reason it is imperative that the college and university administrators be consulted before and throughout the planning exercise as the scope of suggested changes, and the required increased or reallocated funding, is determined. The music executive should make sure that the plan has the support needed at all levels for its successful implementation throughout the time frame being proposed.

As mentioned before, the music facilities should also be considered in strategic planning. They must be able to appropriately accommodate the plans being made. Since music requires a good deal of specific-use facilities, one should be sure that they will be available to support

the programs and activities implied by the plans. If not, then the plans and the time frame might need to be adjusted accordingly.

Faculty members are usually not accustomed to extensive all-inclusive planning. Most music faculty are hired because of their strong qualifications in one or two areas of music, with the expectation that they will bring the area(s) for which they have responsibility to the highest possible level. Therefore, they might bring a rather myopic view of the department or school to their planning participation. For this reason, one often will find faculty whose model for programs is based primarily on recreating their own educational experiences, regardless of appropriateness to the unit in which they are now employed.

Since the realization of academic programs is a faculty responsibility, the faculty, both individually and collectively, have a great deal of autonomy. Hence, it behooves the music executive to be sure that they are fully engaged in the planning process and understand the implications of all the various aspects of the planning initiative. No one has more autonomy than a music professor when he or she goes into the classroom, studio, or rehearsal hall. What they do there is what truly becomes the reality of the academic planning.

Demographics are an important consideration in strategic planning, especially because such planning makes assumptions regarding the future change anticipated in the makeup of the communities the institution serves, whether local, state, regional, national, or even international, including the ethnicity and age of the students enrolling in higher education. This demographic data can have serious implications for recruiting students to specific programs and for engaging the communities to be served. Such projections are not easy to make; thus, all too often planning looks back on what has happened and not realistically enough toward what might yet occur.

A serious consideration in future planning should be engagement with the community, which is always expected of music programs. Many available sources comment on trends and make projections. Since we cannot have an infallible prescience when predicting what music units will face, we need to take advantage of those sources that regularly examine projected trends and patterns. A most helpful source for those responsible for planning is the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In the field of music the executive should make themselves familiar with the reports, publications, and programs of the National Association of Schools of Music, the College Music Society, and the various professional associations.

Many of the higher education music programs in the United States developed out of the background and heritage of several generations of mainly European immigrants. As a result, music programs have been modeled primarily after European conservatories, which dedicated themselves to performing and creating Western European art music. Over the years many other ethnic groups have adapted to these programs while also promoting changes that represent their heritage. The current significant increase in the Asian and Latino population, in some areas of the country in particular, will certainly influence both society and education. The potential effect of this change in demographics on a music unit must be considered in planning for recruiting students, developing degree programs, or engaging the greater community. Such a population shift could also bring economic changes that might affect the funding of higher education.

Implementation is the music executive's responsibility; thus, he or she must be sure that the extent and timetable for implementation of the plan is clearly understood by all responsible for its execution. Everyone involved in the planning, not only the music executive, must feel that they are "stakeholders" in the agreed-upon consensus the plan represents. The details of the plan should be clearly articulated in a way that lays out actionable priorities and holds everyone accountable for their part in putting the written document into action.

Evaluation is another critical part of strategic planning. Once a time line has been established and the plan has been initiated, its outcomes and the creditability of its assumptions should be periodically evaluated. All too often faculty and staff feel that when a long and detailed planning period ends, so does their involvement. Actually, their role has just begun, because everyone needs to be vigilant in evaluating the results of the plan and, if needed, adapting its goals to the reality of the situation. The planners become the facilitators. Thus, the music unit should establish a continuing forum in which to discuss and evaluate outcomes and react to contingencies. This task is one of the most challenging and continuing responsibilities of strategic planning for the music executive.

A Final Thought

As this chapter has sought to emphasize, planning lays a foundation upon which the music unit's vision and mission can be made actionable. It can provide the music executive with a context within which he or she can interact with both faculty and the upper administration. When either of these constituencies experiences personnel changes, the plan can provide a focus for articulating and evaluating the ongoing efforts of the music unit.

The strategic plan exists to serve the music unit, not to be served. Periodic "benchmarks" are useful for measuring progress. The music executive and the faculty should review the plan's continuing relevancy, preferably on an annual basis. It must remain adaptable to the realities of any given situation and the shared goals of the profession of music in higher education.