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2014

Book Review of The Human Side of the Strategic Planning Process in Higher Education by Robert P. Delprino

Katherine C. Aquino

St. John's University, czadoaqk@stjohns.edu

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Recommended Citation

Aquino, K. C. (2014). Book Review of The Human Side of the Strategic Planning Process in Higher Education by Robert P. Delprino. *Planning for Higher Education*, 42(2), 94-95. Retrieved from https://scholar.stjohns.edu/administrative_instructional_leadership_facpubs/9

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The Human Side of the Strategic Planning Process in Higher Education by Robert P. Delprino emphasizes the necessity of interpersonal collaboration, looking in detail at the human qualities required to achieve a fully integrated institutional strategic plan. The author provides a range of techniques to improve the cooperative process at the postsecondary level, many of which may serve to aid in the difficult transition from idealistic objectives to well-thought-out team strategies. Incorporating personal experience, theory, and empirical evidence, Delprino highlights the interrelated roles of the institutions' various stakeholders. Though strategic planning is a multidimensional undertaking, for Delprino, "at the end of the day it is still all about the people" (p. 10).

At a time when higher education is driven by concepts such as "institutional effectiveness" and "student learning outcomes," this text does important work in taking apart ornate postsecondary organizational efforts to reorganize the planning process in terms of the importance, and potential, of the individual. The author creates a foundation for understanding how each institutional member might actively participate in and successfully contribute to ongoing initiatives or groundbreaking ideas. This foundation is built on the complex relationships and roles enacted throughout the planning process: the awareness and willingness of the singular institutional member, the connections between the individual and other stakeholders, and the process taking place as the institution's members unite and holistically contribute to change.

Over the course of five chapters, the text discusses in detail the process of creating institution-wide inclusion and the possible challenges that may arise in doing so. The idea of institutional members "buying into" the planning process may be met with disinterest, uncertainty, or disdain.

However, Delprino, a professor of psychology and faculty trainer at the SCUP Planning Institute, provides expert advice on overcoming potential obstacles and developing a better sense of community among stakeholders. A vital concept is the idea of integrated planning. Defined as the "linking of vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making and action" (p. ii), integrated planning provides the structure and impetus needed to move the institution toward meeting overall goals and future needs. The theme of integrated planning resonates throughout the text, creating a way for administrators to prioritize institutional needs within the ebb and flow of the collective planning process.

Chapter 1, "Change Is a People Process," introduces the essential components of a strategic planning structure that seeks to achieve maximum interpersonal success. Stressing the importance of adaptability within the institutional environment, the author discusses the effectiveness and success of the open-system approach--a framework that considers both the internal and external variables contributing to the postsecondary dynamic. This approach addresses the influence of the human response on structural concerns and ever-changing institutional needs.

Throughout, Delprino draws attention to the necessity for, but variability of, the numerous institutional roles that contribute to the strategic planning process. Although members may experience varying levels of involvement, in order to move forward in the planning process all must be cognizant of the individual strengths and team dynamics that contribute to a forward-moving strategic plan. To achieve maximum efficiency, each member must be willing to create a

dialogue based on trust. By building an interconnected group, the team becomes able to effectively approach institutional politics.

Chapter 4, "Tools for Getting Others Involved in the Strategic Planning Process," provides a survey of available planning facilitation tools, but warns that they must be "thoroughly understood and practiced before they are used" (p. 52) in higher education planning. Nominal group technique, scenario planning, Hollow Square, survey feedback, and real-time strategic change are all listed as potential plan facilitation techniques. Many of these approaches seek to identify constituents' beliefs and concerns, increase inclusion among various stakeholders, and grasp the group consensus in decision-making activities.

In the closing chapter, the author stresses that strategic planning must be actual, a concrete design rather than an abstraction of a perceived objective. Incorporating truly integrated strategic planning, the author notes, engages the human aspect of an organization to produce a cohesive and collective blueprint for institutional change.

Although the text provides a strong foundation for development initiatives, it serves primarily as a summary of literature and theory connected to strategic planning.

Due to the large number of empirical examples provided, Delprino can only skim the surface of planning-based theories and leaves the reader, at times, wanting supplementary information. The book does successfully describe the groundwork necessary for transforming the postsecondary institution into an organized and proactive planning environment. Readers have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with planning process theory and learn how to initiate strategy development. Throughout, the author continually reminds the reader of the essentiality of human characteristics and interpersonal development to any forward-thinking institution, ultimately arriving at an appreciated contribution to the field of higher education and, more specifically, the discipline of college planning.

Delprino, R. P. (2013). *The human side of the strategic planning process in higher education*. Society for College and University Planning.