

The Introduction of Continuous Planning in a Maturing Institution

Linda R. Delunas and Bruce Bergland

Abstract

This paper describes the experience of one university in developing a Shared Vision and planning strategically for achieving it. At Indiana University Northwest, strategic planning is an ongoing process that is moving the campus toward its vision for the future and the long-term outcomes derived from it. Unlike traditional strategic outcomes that are finitely measurable, IU Northwest's outcomes are aspirational and include such things as civility, diversity, and engagement. This paper describes a journey from organizational fragmentation to integrated, vision-based planning and accreditation processes.

Indiana University Northwest is an urban, commuter campus located in Gary, Indiana. A regional campus of Indiana University, it has an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students in undergraduate and a few, select Master's programs, and enjoys the most diverse student body of the entire Indiana University system. During the mid- to late 1990s IU Northwest experienced a period of declining enrollments and increasing faculty displeasure with the direction the campus seemed to be going and with the leadership in place at the time. This period culminated in the early departure of the then Chancellor and a commitment by statewide university administration to assist in putting into place a leader who would move the campus forward. At the same time, within the state of Indiana there was an imperative by the Higher Education Commission to formalize and fully develop a Community College Initiative, something that up until then had not existed in the state. Ultimately, Dr. Bruce Bergland was announced as the new Chancellor-Select, and it was under his leadership and within this context that the vision and planning processes began.

Shortly before his arrival, Chancellor-Select Bergland, in consultation with the Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, requested that a committee be convened to develop a strategic planning process. Soon thereafter, the committee delivered to Dr. Bergland their proposed plan, "Creating a Shared Vision for Indiana University Northwest's Mission, Vision, and Values: A Planning Process to Position IU Northwest for Success in the Competitive Environment of the Twenty-first Century and Within the Community College Initiative" (Indiana University Northwest 2000). It proposed the development of a Shared Vision Steering Committee made up of faculty, staff, administrators, students and community leaders to develop a shared vision, assess past and current campus conditions, and develop action plans for success in the future. On his arrival in July of 1999, Chancellor Bergland convened the committee and charged it with preparing, by the end of the following academic year, statements of a shared

vision for IU Northwest, strategic areas of focus for the institution, programmatic and extracurricular priorities, and action plans for the subsequent two years.

The Chancellor committed to being an active participant in all meetings and hired an external facilitator to help the committee stay focused and to offer expertise in the processes that would be necessary to move forward. The committee developed a set of shared values to guide them in the visioning process, including respect for different learning styles and diverse perspectives, a firm commitment to fostering wide-reaching engagement in the process and working in creative rather than reactive ways (Indiana University Northwest 2000).

Creating a Shared Vision

According to the Shared Vision Steering Committee (SVSC), one of the products of their work would be a shared vision or an “image of what the campus would look like when working at peak performance as a learning organization” (Indiana University Northwest 2000). This mirrors Senge’s (1990) idea of a shared vision, i.e., a shared picture of the future that fosters commitment and engagement rather than simply compliance. The “Shared Vision Report” was to become IU Northwest’s “guidebook” for the future, i.e., a blueprint for the where the campus would be going over the next decade.

In order to accomplish its work, the SVSC organized itself into working groups that would take lead responsibility for such things as developing a task list and timelines for projects, ensuring communications, gathering and analyzing data, setting up and conducting face-to-face meetings and focus groups, and an “A-Team” that would have accountability for coordinating the work of the groups and ensuring that their work was progressing. The groups committed to engaging the widest possible array of stakeholders and to helping all participants understand the concept of working toward the vision rather than problem-solving the present.

Over the next year, the SVSC developed three rounds of participation and feedback on a draft vision statement and strategic areas of focus for the campus. Invitations to participate were widely distributed via the University’s Web site, e-mail communication, posters, alumni letters, student “table sessions,” local paper inserts, letters to regional business people, and through local radio and television interviews. Sessions were held on campus in face-to-face meetings and throughout the seven-county region that the University serves with between 250 and 325 people participating in each round. By April of 2000, the SVSC analyzed all feedback and data, finalized the Shared Vision statement (Table 1), and distilled first four, then two strategic areas of focus from eighty to one hundred broad themes that had been suggested by participants. In addition, eight institutional outcomes were developed with action plans for reporting, sustaining and implementing each outcome. Task forces were developed around each outcome, and the SVSC became the Shared Vision Coordinating Committee, which would track the progress of each of the task forces. Faculty and staff were encouraged to become involved in the task forces and to join according to their areas of interest and/or expertise.

Table 1. The Shared Vision of Indiana University Northwest

***The Shared Vision
Indiana University Northwest***

We, the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of IUN, take pride in our unique identity as Indiana University serving the seven-county region of northwest Indiana.

As a student-centered campus, we commit ourselves to academic excellence characterized by a love of ideas and achievement in learning, discovery, creativity, and engagement.

Because we value the complete richness of the human family, we embrace diversity in all its facets and aspire to the full nobility of our shared humanity.

We interact in caring and competent ways to support individual and community aspirations and growth.

We honor and value the contributions of all our members.

We promote well-being through an attractive and convenient environment conducive to learning

Our graduates are prepared for life-long learning, ethical practices, successful careers, and effective citizenship.

Indiana University Northwest collaborates and cooperates with other educational institutions, external partners, and the surrounding communities to enhance our overall quality of life.

It is important to note that the Chancellor, as well as the SVSC members, utilized every opportunity to talk about the vision process and the resulting Shared Vision statement. Reports were given at virtually every Faculty Organization meeting, and progress was reported at almost every speaking engagement in which the Chancellor was involved. Each progress report was followed with a request for faculty, staff and community involvement in the continuing work of the task forces. Despite the openness and transparency of the process, however, many faculty seemed to feel that the process was “closed,” had a hidden agenda or was unnecessary. This phenomenon has been reported in the literature, i.e., it has been hypothesized that faculty who are used to a hierarchical leadership model may be mistrustful of one in which transparency is offered and that faculty who are used to providing input via traditional faculty governance processes may be unprepared for the proactive and rapid processes sometimes necessary for changing an institution’s culture and direction (Wilhite and Silver 2004).

Strategic Areas of Focus and Institutional Outcomes

The strategic areas of focus decided upon by University stakeholders were Unique Identity (Sustainable Health and Well-Being) and Campus Climate. Over the next two academic years task forces worked on implementing action plans related to the eight institutional outcomes that had been developed surrounding those foci. Again, serious and ongoing efforts were made to engage all stakeholders in the process, with the resultant task forces having good representation by faculty, staff, administrators and community members.

Unfortunately, at this point, for faculty and staff who were unwilling or unable to participate in the ongoing work, the process became somewhat confusing. For instance, after the campus decided that its unique identity would revolve around sustainable health and well-being, many faculty misinterpreted this to mean a focus on health care and/or health professions; this was seen as threatening to some in the non-health professions programs and simply as confusing to others. This misinterpretation persisted despite widespread communication clarifying that health and well-being should be very broadly interpreted to mean engagement with the community in all aspects of those things that contribute to overall quality of life. Similar to the experience described by Wilhite and Silver (2004), it seemed as though the more faculty were encouraged to engage in the process, the more some faculty withdrew or disregarded it.

An important institutional outcome identified under the focus area of Unique Identity was for the campus to identify two areas of excellence for which the campus would become known and for which funding would be sought for endowed chairs. The task force charged with this outcome worked tirelessly to solicit input from the campus constituents and the community at large. Ultimately, the areas of excellence agreed upon were *Sustainable Vitality of Northwest Indiana* (later changed to Sustainable Regional Vitality) and *Cultural Discovery and Learning*. These identified areas of excellence also became a serious point of contention for many faculty as some felt that research or scholarship that could not be “pigeonholed” into one of these two areas might not be considered valid or valuable on campus. Despite constant efforts to dispel this thinking, to some extent it continues today.

Shared Vision and Strategic Planning

Beginning in late 2002 and early 2003, the Chancellor appointed his first Strategic Planning Team (SPT). The committee was informed that, unlike traditional strategic planning, planning in this instance would be a continuous process that would eventually drive all other processes on campus. Long-term outcomes were developed that, if achieved, would indicate that the campus had achieved its aspiration of becoming the campus described in its Shared Vision statement. The SPT was to develop short term (primarily one-year) outcomes on an annual basis that would move the campus toward the achievement of long-term (year 2010) vision-derived outcomes (Table 2).

Table 2. Year 2010 Outcomes Derived from the Shared Vision

1. IUN's value for academic excellence as defined by a love of ideas, and achievement and engagement in learning, scholarship, discovery, creativity, and service is clearly reflected in its performance, in its curricula, and in its recognition, reward, and tenure practices.
2. All academic programs and relevant support programs have implemented teaching and learning experiences that ensure they will prepare their 2014 graduates for lifelong learning, ethical practices, developing successful careers, and effective citizenship.
3. IUN students, faculty, staff, and administrators value and demonstrate respect for each other, and support individual and campus community aspirations and growth.
4. IUN values and is recognized for its commitment to diversity as a critical component of excellence in higher education as demonstrated through recruitment and retention of students, faculty, staff and administrators, employment practices, professional development, and its academic programs.
5. IUN demonstrates fiscal responsibility and flexibility in collaborative ways to sustain excellence in its programs and services, and to respond to new opportunities for funding or programs that support the Vision.
6. IUN sets priorities and allocates resources to academically excellent programs and services that clearly foster sustainable regional vitality and/or cultural discovery and learning.
7. Campus decisions, including the allocation of resources, follow and support applicable IUN student-centered principles.
8. IUN successfully collaborates and cooperates in the seven counties it serves on issues relating to sustainable regional vitality and cultural discovery and learning.
9. IUN is a recognized leader in northwest Indiana in using technology to support excellence in learning, scholarship, and student services.

By the time the SPT was in place and had begun its work, there were already many positive changes taking place on campus. Due to the work on institutional outcomes related to Campus Climate, many classrooms had been updated to make them more student friendly and technologically advanced; a set of Student-Centered Principles had been developed to guide such processes as scheduling, advising, and the delivery

of other student services; and initiatives were underway to improve communications on campus. Although these improvements were a direct result of recommendations from the institutional outcomes task forces, there again seemed to be a lack of recognition by some faculty that the improvements and the Shared Vision process were connected.

An important historical note must be made here. By 2002, the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at IU Northwest had been filled on an interim basis for several years. It is probable that many faculty saw work on the vision process and the lack of a permanent leader in Academic Affairs as a lack of attention to or focus on those things considered most important by faculty. Some changes occurring on campus were seen as cosmetic and a distraction from the important business of the campus, i.e., the delivery of high quality academic programs. Many faculty and staff, however, remained engaged in the process.

Another important development at this time was that the campus decided to pursue its accreditation through the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) rather than through the traditional North Central Association PEAQ process. This move was seen by some as an affirmation of the campus's commitment to quality improvement and by others as simply a way to "buy time" in the accreditation process. Nevertheless, acceptance into AQIP meant another continuous process that needed to be integrated into the strategic planning process.

By the end of 2003, the SPT had developed one-year outcomes that would demonstrate progress toward the achievement of 2010 outcomes and the Vision. Members of the SPT accepted responsibility and accountability for ensuring that each outcome would be achieved by the end of the following year, committed to ensuring the widest possible engagement of stakeholders off and on campus, and developed action plans and timelines for the achievement of each outcome. SPT member/sponsors were to solicit membership for their outcome committees with Chairs to be chosen by the committees. Chairs and sponsors met monthly with the Chancellor to provide an update on the progress being made.

During 2004, Outcome Committees worked very hard at soliciting engagement and feedback in the process. In fact, with nine Outcome Committees soliciting feedback on various initiatives, faculty and staff became somewhat overwhelmed trying to respond—what Peters (1994) termed "*death by a thousand initiatives*." However, the campus administrators used many of the "infusion strategies" outlined by Paris (2004) to make the strategic planning process part of the routine academic life of the campus and to keep it in the forefront of the minds of the campus community. Strategies used included the allocation of discretionary funds in line with the plan and the vision, spotlighting the vision and strategic outcomes at high-visibility campus and community events, and assigning point-people (usually faculty sponsors) to champion the priorities (Paris 2004). Every effort was made to dispel the idea that the strategic planning process would produce a final "plan" that would then be put on a shelf and forgotten. This planning process would be ongoing and significant in determining the

direction in which the campus would be going in moving toward achievement of the Shared Vision.

Despite the “learn as you go” atmosphere, Outcome Committees were able to obtain significant, rich feedback from the campus, and all were able to achieve their assigned short-term outcomes. Deliverables the first year included a Student Profile of Academic Excellence; the development of criteria with which to prioritize academic and support programs, as well as a program prioritization process for introducing new programs; a shared code of professional conduct for the campus; a shared definition and understanding of diversity as a critical part of academic excellence; and a shared understanding of the definitions of the campus’ two areas of excellence.

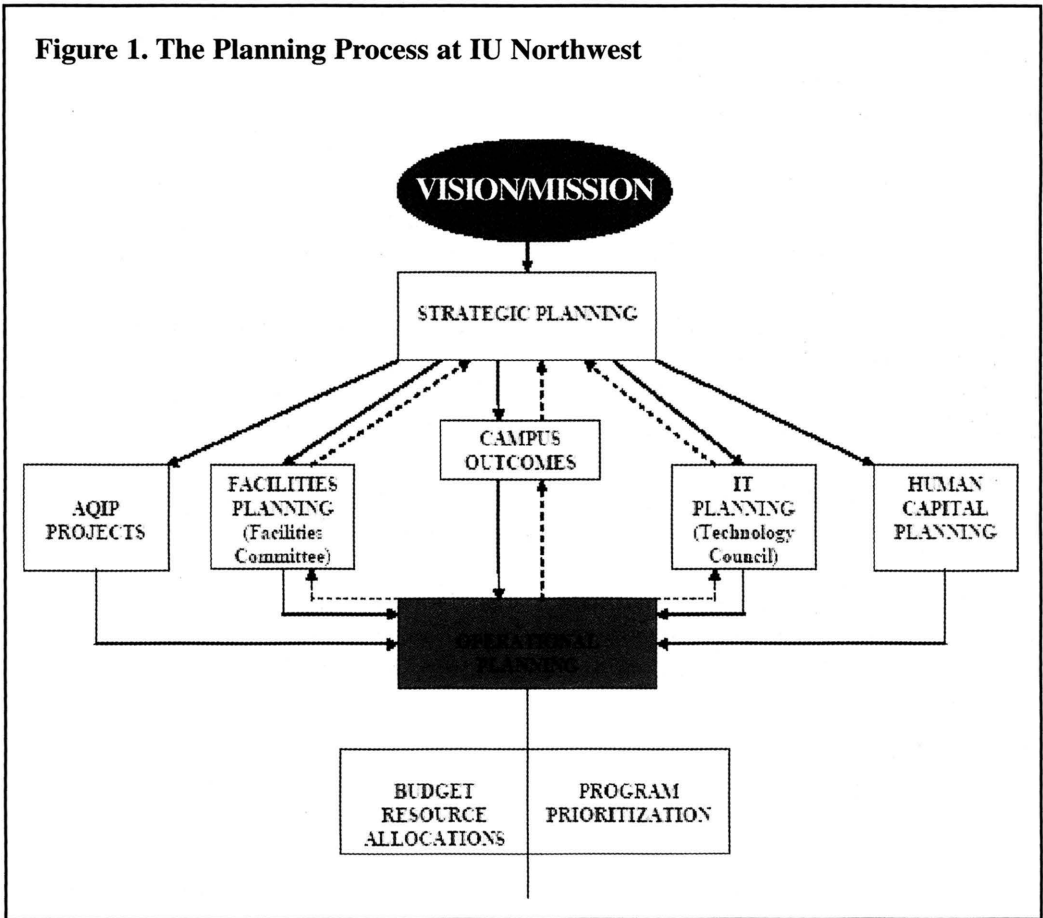
Also, during this year, the SPT began to look at how they could align other campus processes with the overall strategic planning process. For instance, the annual SPT retreat was moved from May, as originally planned, to November so that decisions made could better align with the campus’s budgeting processes. Additionally, a Facilities Planning process was developed that also aligned with the Shared Vision and 2010 Outcomes.

By the end of 2004, the campus had achieved its first set of short-term outcomes and continued moving toward integrating not only budgeting and facilities planning, but also such processes as technology planning, human capital planning and accreditation. In November, the SPT developed its next set of one-year outcomes; it was also decided that faculty or staff willing to chair that years’ outcomes committees should be compensated for service above what is normally expected. A small but significant stipend was instituted for successful completion of the year’s work. This was one small but visible way that the campus could model rewarding of excellence (service).

2005 outcomes that were achieved included, among other things, definitions and measurable characteristics of excellence in academic programs, administration, staff and faculty; measurable criteria for preparation of students for life-long learning, civic engagement, ethical practice, and effective citizenship; student-service philosophies developed by each unit on campus; and an established program to increase hiring and retention of a diverse faculty.

Significantly, by the end of 2005, the SPT decided that its processes were mature enough that Outcome work could best be accomplished by integrating it into already established faculty governance and administrative processes. In other words, yearly outcomes established by the SPT would in effect become the yearly campus priorities driving all work. Other integrated processes that were developed and aligned with the ongoing strategic planning process included information technology (IT) planning, the beginnings of a human capital plan, and the academic prioritization process. Alignment of the planning processes is shown in Figure 1. At this point it became apparent that the strategic planning process had indeed become a “part of the routine academic life of the campus” (Paris 2004).

Figure 1. The Planning Process at IU Northwest



Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although the strategic planning process at IU Northwest has been a success (albeit a continuing process) it has not evolved without challenges. Even the words “strategic planning,” corporate in origin, can evoke serious opposition from faculty (Paul 2005). This phenomenon is evidenced at IU Northwest, although as the planning process has become “routine,” outspoken opposition has waned and engagement has remained high.

As Paul notes, it is well documented that “communication of strategy is a significant factor in the success of strategy implementation” (2005, 127). This lesson has been made very clear. One clear success of IU Northwest’s journey has been increased mechanisms for communication. Web pages, e-listservs, and news magazines, perhaps inevitable, have been institutionalized and are well accepted and used by faculty and staff. Yearly celebrations of planning successes also help make progress more visible and offer another opportunity to become engaged in the process.

In terms of logistical planning, the SPT learned quickly that inundating faculty and staff with requests for feedback was very problematic and often led to confusion. After

the first year, the SPT paid more careful attention to timelines for requests for feedback and input. That helped, but never really solved the dilemma. However, as the planning and outcome work became routine, requests for feedback in some cases became integrated into normal reporting processes.

As noted earlier, a serious challenge during the past few years has been the lack of a permanent Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs at IU Northwest. Although it can be viewed as remarkable that so much has been achieved in that context, it also has presented problems. There has been no consistent academic voice championing the cause of the Shared Vision and strategic planning process. Faculty look to the academic leader on campus for communication, guidance, and help with establishing priorities; the absence of a central academic voice can contribute to faculty feeling that what they would consider traditional academic priorities are being neglected. Fortunately, in July of 2006, IU Northwest did hire a permanent Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the institution is now well positioned to move forward on new initiatives created, in part, by the continuous planning process.

In summary, the strategic planning process at IU Northwest has now been institutionalized and progress toward achieving its Shared Vision is being made. Although progress is sometimes painful, it is progress nevertheless.

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Author Information

Linda R. Delunas, Ph.D., R.N. is an Associate Professor of Nursing and Faculty Assistant to the Chancellor at Indiana University Northwest. She has been a faculty member at IU Northwest since 1984.

Bruce Bergland, Ph.D. is the Chancellor at Indiana University Northwest and Professor of Psychology. Prior to coming to IU Northwest, Dr. Bergland was at Trinity College of Vermont where he served as Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs.

Linda R. Delunas, Ph.D., R.N.
Indiana University Northwest
3400 Broadway
Gary, IN 46408
E-mail: ldelunas@iun.edu
Telephone: 219-980-6643

Bruce Bergland, Ph.D.
Indiana University Northwest
3400 Broadway
Gary, IN 46408
E-mail: bberglan@iun.edu
Telephone: 219-980-6988