

Elements of the Planning Process  
in  
Monograph on Comprehensive River Basin Planning  
Hodges, R.C. et al Edit. 1976 Environment Canada

- A Brief Summary -

Assignment #1 MRM 646  
M.R. Gardner

## Introduction

1. Context. In order to identify the planning sequence as a whole the authors of Comprehensive River Basin Planning suggest that "Planning" should be viewed as a three-part continuum. The three parts are: pre-planning, planning, and implementation. Within these three stages it is noted that there are two transitional stages with the critical period being between completion of a "Plan" in part two and its implementation in part three.

To ensure that stage two, that of planning, follows a comprehensive process that:

- i) foresees all of the requirements necessary for the development of a "plan"; and,
- ii) describes the many tasks to be scheduled and undertaken; and,
- iii) accomodates human, social, technical and economic considerations

the authors propose a seven-element procedure for building a "Planning (Design?) Process". It is noted that planning takes place in a dynamic setting where the physical, economic, social, and political contexts change, often rapidly. Thus, the planning process must be flexible and iterative in order to deal with problems that may have changed markedly as the planning process proceeds.

The seven elements are suggested by the Monograph authors as essential to any planning process. These elements and various constraints, considerations, or concerns that attend the process framework are briefly summarized in the following section.

### Elements of the Planning Process

1. Awareness: Those involved or likely to be involved in the process must be aware of the need for planning (and, presumably, a planning process).

Considerations: There will be different levels of perception as to the need and type of planning necessary. If no attempt is made to develop a common benchmark of understanding amongst those initially involved in the process, this may well cause conflict at later stages.

2. Early Decisions: As the planning group is formed, who will, or will not, be included must be determined.

Considerations: Agencies, groups, etc. may be included or excluded to the advantage or detriment of the process.

- The actual staff, job title, level of responsibilities, etc. will govern individual representatives' input and credibility in the planning process.
- Each actor in the process will have a level of "standing" that in turn may effect the process itself.
- Each actor (and perhaps agency, etc.) will bring to the process certain preconceived ideas as to the "Problem" and possible "Solutions".

3. Objective Setting: As the initial process begins a first priority should be to establish clear objectives. In some cases these may be of an interim nature until the totality of the problem is fully understood.

Considerations: Objectives should not be glossed over.

- All parties to the process should be involved in, understand and be committed to the objectives.
- Junior staff should not be the prime objective setting individuals.
- Mandate for the study may provide basic objective directions and study scope.
- Objectives should be pragmatic not theoretical.
- Wherever possible quantitative objectives should be set to allow final tests of accomplishment.
- Every effort should be made to resolve obviously conflicting objectives.

It is recommended that a procedure for developing objectives be developed. Suggestions include:

- i) Identification of any goals
- ii) Examination of historical precedents and events
- iii) Full understanding of mandate and overseeing group expectations
- iv) A feedback mechanism to check staff comprehension of proposed (and actual) objectives
- v) Consultation with "in" and "out" groups affected by the outcome of any final "Plan"
- vi) Continuous review of presently established objectives

4. Study Scope: Actors involved in the process should participate in determining their (and the overall) program scope.

Considerations: At this stage rigid scope and organizational structure should be avoided.

- Study components must be established
- The depth and detail for each component must be set with full participation by those likely to undertake the studies
- Constraints of money, time, and available expertise must be realistic and govern study scope

- Issues and problems should be clearly defined
- The probable problem evaluation methodologies should be determined at this stage
- The number of possible alternatives and types of problem solution should be determined at this stage
- Study scope should be defined by considering (amongst other concerns):
  - i) Style of planning process
  - ii) Identify of internal and external "actors"
  - iii) Study boundaries (a)Physical and (b) Conceptual
  - iv) Responsibilities within the study
  - v) Communications within the study
  - vi) Study workload
  - vii) Known biases of study team
  - viii) Known facts
  - ix) Political, Institutional and Financial "constraints"
  - x) Public, Social, or Organized group "constraints"

5. Scheduling and Costing: Study scope and objectives may determine possible schedules and expenditures.

Considerations: Often budget limits scope of study.

- Comprimes and expediency may distort or destroy study "fabric"
- Priority work must be determined
- Field work must have realistic time horizons
- C/P, flowcharting and other time assignment techniques should be considered for scheduling
- Individual tasks and task responsibilities should be clear and agreed to by the appropriate actors
- Progress and final reporting formats should be set at this time when possible

6. Problem Recognition: Team comprehension of the "problem" or "problems" under study must be clearly elucidated.

Considerations: The existing data-base for:

- i) Physical
- ii) Chemical
- iii) Biological
- iv) Social
- v) Economic

parameters should be determined.

- Data-base documentation should be done in detail to determine:
  - i) Reliability
  - ii) Extent and comprehensiveness
  - iii) Further needs
  - iv) Accuracy for extrapolations
  - v) Assessment units

- All issues that comprise the problem both of direct interest to the study team and "external" should be recognized, documented and considered
- Study team "values" should be explicit

Study Design and Inter-relationships: Here the authors suggest that the individual studies that will form the overall study are tied together from a basis of individual significance and relevance.

Considerations: Issues should be defined.

- Groups likely to be impinged upon by decisions should be identified
- Study intensity must be equitable for each component of the study
- Each alternative should be assessed using the same criteria
- Timing of individual studies should "fit" together
- The study report should reflect the scientific independence of each study
- Study segments should have explicit conceptual linkages
- Budget allocations for the study period should be explicit and safeguarded

### Conclusions

Whilst the authors attempt, and do show, that a flexible, responsive "people" oriented planning process is necessary they fail in providing a clear outline of the total "process".

In fact, the section entitled Elements of the Planning Process would have been better titled Elements of the Planning Design Process since consideration (at least in the text) of the latter components in their schematic model, namely Development of Alternatives, Assessment of Alternatives, Assessment of Impacts, Selection of Alternatives and Program assembly as well as Pilot studies and Program Adoption are not discussed. This is a major omission.

Further the author section 7 is poorly laid out and the ideas unclearly stated. This writer's summary attempts to identify their ideas.

The major weaknesses in the process as noted in the monograph are that it does not discuss (in addition to the topics noted above):

- i) Establishment of Criteria
- ii) Study strategies
- iii) The concept of a "Program"
- iv) "Program", "Plan", or "Study" controls
- v) Integration of individual "Studies into an overall program.

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(DESIGN?)

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