

Professional Meets Personal: Bringing the Whole Self to Work

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As professionals, planners are expected to offer independent, objective advice to clients and employers. *Professional* implies limiting the personal in planning behaviour. This is never easy in work that requires one's full presence and it is increasingly at odds with the challenges and contextual demands that planners face - for example, as facilitators and negotiators, or in highly charged collaborative processes where people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. How might the planning profession admit more of the arational and the personal as legitimate planning behaviour? One pathway involves practitioners becoming more self-aware, identifying their predispositions to "thinking" and "feeling" ways of planning, and learning to be more flexible in making use of non-preferred ways. Engaging in dialogue enables them to share and develop situationally appropriate strategies for managing the ongoing tension between professional and personal, not as either/or but as both/and.

Revisiting Professionalism

Everyday language distinguishes *amateur* from *professional*, someone doing paid work at a high level of competence and capability. Beyond that, a professional is one who holds

membership in a recognized profession that, when fully evolved, has these attributes: exclusive claim to and mastery of a stock of systematic, coherent, specialized knowledge and exclusive right to practice in that field; extended education/training in professional schools and apprenticeship under the guidance of a member; a service ideal, oriented primarily to the public interest; the right to control who practices; a code of professional conduct and ethics along with the means to discipline violators; continuing education to maintain members' competence; and a professional organization empowered to ensure that these standards are met.

Is planning such a profession? Not yet, in the classical sense. At best, it's still evolving. The planning profession in Canada has a dubious claim to exclusive knowledge, a diffuse body of theory around which there is little consensus or apparent interest, and weak disciplinary processes.¹ Nonetheless, the *image* of professional continues to be attractive, actively pursued and influential in the practice of planning.

A list of attributes doesn't reveal much about professional *behaviour*. What distinguishes how planners act when they are being professionals? An important expectation is communicated by the Canadian Institute of Planners' Code of Professional Conduct (1994): the responsibility "to provide independent professional opinion to clients, employers, the public, and tribunals." Independent is commonly understood

to mean arms-length, impartial and objective.² Arms-length suggests keeping a distance to discourage personal contact and familiarity. Impartial refers to absence of bias and

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prejudice as well as fair treatment to achieve a proper balance of interests concerned. Objective goes further: dealing with facts or conditions without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices or interpretations, hence the dictionary definition "having reality external to or independent of the mind." Compare this with subjectivity, emanating from an individual's personal thoughts, opinions, biases and feelings; reality is personally constructed, "in here" rather "out there" waiting to be discovered through investigation. Rendering independent professional opinion therefore necessitates distancing oneself from one's own interests and feelings and from undue external influence. Situations are dealt with impersonally, with detachment,

impartiality and fairness. "Personal" is restricted to meaning that the professional opinion belongs to that individual, drawing upon their knowledge and experience.

A classic example is the planner as expert witness before a tribunal. Criteria for acceptance in this role - professional membership, competence and independence - are intended to ensure that such opinions rendered will be based on planning expertise and will not simply echo the position of client or employer.³ As a former member of several such tribunals, I suspect that they find it especially difficult to deal with evidence, often presented in painfully personal terms, that comes from advocates and other participants, such as concerned citizens, who oppose a project on grounds seemingly rooted in self-interest. It's more comfortable and easier to reach a decision after a hearing where technical experts present their cases objectively and "truth" emerges from cross-examination. Unfortunately, as many have noted, this kind of objectivity is a convenient myth that privileges certain interests. It is incomprehensible to people whose everyday lives operate from a different way of knowing. And it can be problematic for planners who must suppress aspects of themselves in order to appear credible.

The Arational in Professional Practice

Planning is often said to be an applied science and an art (CIP 1994). Science is the source of the image of independent, impartial, objective professional. Donald Schön (1983) calls this technical rationality. It stresses scientific method as an objective means of providing

information to decision makers, relies on facts separated from values as the basis for knowledge, favours quantified data and models as a means of inquiry, emphasizes analysis over interaction, and searches for "best" solutions to problems. Some time back, Schön argues, professional planners embraced this "dominant epistemology of practice" to enhance the status of their fledgling profession by substituting scientific knowledge for their traditional reliance on experience gained through practice. Never mind that probably not a lot of real science finds its way into the average planner's daily work where "the 'best' solution is often established by subjective value judgements, which must be balanced with or against 'rational scientific' analysis" (Steil 1988, 154).

The technical-expert role, providing independent professional opinion, captures only part of what most professional planners actually do.⁴ John Forester's extensive research into everyday planning behaviour finds it to be mostly communicative work: focusing and shaping attention through meeting, listening, negotiating, facilitating, and the like. Planners apply knowledge and exercise skills that are technical as well as interactive and political, bringing into play both the rational and the arational. In collaborative planning practice, "fact and feeling, reason and emotion are often tightly intertwined" (Forester 1989, 107). A narrowly framed, impersonal style of planning can be risky and self-defeating, "producing not professionalism but the impression of insensitivity, misunderstanding, callous neglect, and, as a result, not cooperation but anger directed at the planning analyst" (Forester, 210). Similar risk is incurred when planners working with culturally diverse publics disregard ways of

knowing not grounded in scientific/technical investigation (Sandercock, 1998).

Rationality has long been a cornerstone of planning (Breheny and Hooper 1985). In an ordinary everyday sense, *rational* refers to positions or actions based on logical reasoning rather than emotion or impulse. The opposite, *irrational*, denotes

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unreasonable and out of one's mind, which confirms rationality as primarily a cognitive mental function.⁵ Translate rationality to planning and decision-making and we have the familiar model: establish a goal, consider alternatives, evaluate consequences, and select for implementation the alternative that offers the best outcome in relation to the goal. Aside from the many shortcomings of this approach, variants of it survive and thrive, partly because the expectation of rational behaviour is so deeply ingrained in our society and its institutions. But whose rationality?

Don't most people think they are being reasonable? Irrational depends on how reality is framed. In the worlds of planning there exist multiple rationalities, to be negotiated in arriving at courses of action that are feasible, acceptable and ethical. Planners have to be prepared to deal not only with assorted versions of rational and irrational but also with the *arational* – other than rational, where reason and logic are seemingly absent but not necessarily violated (as in knowing something without knowing how you came to know it). Arational includes subjectivity, moral and value judgements, feelings, instinct, intuition and non-traditional forms of meaning-making; conclusions are reached by processes difficult to track or explain but which are nevertheless valid, and valuable.

Increasingly, the arational is "intruding into" professional planning practice. Evidence is abundant. Interactive roles

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involving people skills – facilitator, mediator, negotiator, manager, etc. – are clearly on the rise in the planning field. Effective facilitators let the group see them as human, listen to their own intuition, are in touch with themselves and their emotional needs, manage their feelings when conflict erupts, set aside their substantive expertise to

accept "ordinary knowledge" as valid, and are able to hear and listen to a multiplicity of voices. This connects with the recent emphasis on emotional intelligence which includes self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation and social skills such as communication, empathy, conflict management, collaboration and teamwork (Goleman 1998). Ditto for the growing recognition of intuition (Weintraub 1998) and other forms of nonlinear thinking as critical qualities for planning and management in an era of "chaos, complexity and change" (Sanders, 1998). These trends significantly challenge planners who define themselves too narrowly as impersonal detached professionals.

Creating Space for the Personal

Aspects of the arational find their way into professional practice – subjectivity, intuition and value judgements are obvious examples – but they enter with caution and may be difficult to acknowledge, especially in formal settings. Most of what is seen as arational is assigned to the ambiguous category called personal.

Professions find their own ways of dealing with apparent conflicts between professional and personal. An example is the practice of detached caring which acknowledges a painful dilemma: while the quality of care provided depends in no small measure on personal relationships between clients and caregivers, these professionals must bound their care to preserve their own wellbeing and avoid burnout. Planning has yet to come up with similar precepts that enable us to assert our kind of caring and legitimately bring our selves more fully into our work.

One possibility is to redefine "detachment," from distancing and disinterest to "the capacity to care deeply from an objective place."⁶ Objectivity would then be akin to non-attachment: the ability to engage fully with clients without getting caught up in their emotional positions; paradoxically, dissociated yet still connected, or, as Jack Hawley puts it (1993, 21), staying in the game and being more effective at it by getting away from it. Such a stance (familiar to psychotherapists, nurses and other caregivers) is accompanied by resilience, discernment, equanimity and adaptability, all essential qualities when dealing with diversity, conflict and change.

It may be tempting to collapse the professional/personal distinction altogether, as feminists did in the 70s when they claimed that the political is personal and the personal political.⁷ But professional and personal in planning are not synonymous or mutually inclusive; overlapping and interrelated, yes, but one does not encompass the other. In most professional contexts, certain aspects of the personal (beyond owning one's opinion) inevitably enter planning practice; to pretend otherwise is self-deluding. Still, there are limits, both practical and ethical, on how far personal can go before it ceases to be professional. And in some settings, such as on the witness stand or "speaking truth to power," credible professional behaviour may require temporary bracketing of certain facets of the personal.

Professional and personal may be best viewed not as either/or but as both/and. Barry Johnson (1992) would call them a polarity, i.e., interdependent opposites whose tension must be managed on an ongoing basis. Each pole has an upside

and a downside. For example, focusing exclusively on a narrowly defined professional posture may bring more credibility with other professionals and less anxiety about having to deal with emotions, but it can also turn off people at meetings and miss out on key data inputs. On the other hand, a strongly personal stance may bring greater acceptance by the publics and a richer set of options, but at the price of emotional drain, fatigue and fear of diminished credibility. The trick is to capture as much as possible of the positive aspects while minimizing the negatives.

Managing polarities isn't new to planners seeking to achieve vision *and* practicality, flexibility *and* commitment. The innovation in this case lies in thinking through in advance the appropriate professional/personal mix in each context. For this to happen, a good deal of self-awareness and flexibility is required on the part of the individual. And here, people differ.

Sorting Out the Personal: One Mode

It seems that most individuals have certain personality-type preferences that predispose them to act in certain ways irrespective of the situational demands and, conversely, that make it difficult for them to be as flexible as they need or would like to be (Lang 1995). Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, four sets of opposing preferences can be identified, all of them relevant to planning.⁸ One of these, the focus here, addresses different ways people reach conclusions and make decisions.⁹ *Thinking* is an objective process involving logical, impersonal analysis of situations and cause-effect relations; *Feeling* is a subjective

process based on personal values, what feels right, and the impacts of decisions on self and others. While we sometimes make use of our non-preferred way, the one that's more often favoured impels us into a distinct pattern of deciding:

- Those who prefer Thinking are likely to analyze what's wrong in a situation, move quickly to problem-solving, examine the pros/cons and consequences of possible courses of action, and exclude or devalue information not logically consistent with the required decision. Most people with a Thinking preference know that the human factor is important and take it into account but as only one among other factors considered significant. At times it may seem that, more concerned about abstract concepts such as fairness, they give insufficient weight to individual people's needs.
- Those who prefer Feeling typically identify with others and empathize with people affected by their proposals. In the examination of alternatives, harmony with professed values receives prime consideration as does information, logical or otherwise, deemed important by the people involved. It's not that most Feeling types fail to use logic in analyzing situations and making decisions; rather, their logical process includes and prioritizes individuals and groups, personal interactions, and values. Unlike Thinking types who tend to favour orderly and efficient decision-making, those preferring Feeling are more likely to opt for decisions reached through consensus.¹⁰

Granted, planners will not always be able to follow their preferences; other variables can intervene, such as exigencies of the situation, external pressure to plan a certain way, and dominance of one or more members of a team. Nonetheless, type preference can be influential, especially when there's a fair amount of freedom to determine how to proceed.

Although data are scarce, it appears that most planners are Thinking types (and more often intuitive than Sensing).¹¹ Relative absence of Feeling types¹² does not bode well for

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planning processes calling for the strengths this function brings. It may help explain why many planners seek refuge in a style of practice that is more impersonal. Rather than being "in a state of arrested emotional development,"¹³ the planning profession may be dominated by a different way of investigating, interacting and deciding – head more

than heart. It's not that the Thinking way is wrong, it's just incomplete and in some situations inappropriate if used alone.

Effective planning requires exercise of the full range of personality-type preferences to balance off each type's strengths and weaknesses (biases toward certain theoretical models, forms of knowledge, methods, information inputs and outcomes) and to transform difference into complementarity. Ideally, the preferences of a planning team should match the situation. Where this is not possible something else is needed: "type flexibility," being able to access and enact one's non-preferences when the situation calls for it (Lang 1997). Type flexibility has limits - for a Thinking type to behave in a Feeling manner takes more energy, is difficult to sustain for long, and is most difficult when fatigued or stressed - but it can be learned, if planners and educators are willing.

Bringing the Whole Self to Professional Planning

The conventional image of "professional" is unable to capture the fullness of planning practice. Professional planners are not just providers of independent professional opinion. This frame is an inadequate fit with the contexts in which many planners work, it limits their approaches, and it requires them to suppress personal qualities while pretending to be something less than they are. Impaired professional and personal effectiveness that is likely to result is a disservice to clients and it detracts from the individual's versatility, an important consideration at a time when organizational loyalty and job security are on the wane (Lang 1998).

My concern is for planning as it is and for what it needs to become. Circumstances in which planners find themselves sometimes require adopting the stance of independent

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expert but that cannot be the only arrow in the practitioner's quiver. There are plenty of signs indicating that more of the personal ought to be a legitimate part of the planner's behavioural repertoire.¹⁴ Enlarging that repertoire, however, goes beyond skills to encompass qualities, values and ethics:

...technique or skill alone is insufficient. There is also a person using that technique, whose personality extends into and well beyond the technique itself, and who affects the outcome of most social interventions profoundly. People respond to other people in their fullness, not just to the tools they employ On a personal level, if we want to become more skilled practitioners, then it is essential to develop those parts of our own natures which are most closely associated with intervention success. Admitting the heart into the study of social and community change is an indicator of both personal and professional strength (Berkowitz 1982, 186, 188).

Making more room for the personal in professional practice is easier said than done. The ultimate proving ground is in each individual and each practice setting. Redrawing professional/personal boundaries includes revising the Code of Professional Conduct to set some general parameters. For CIP and its affiliates this means rethinking "professional planner" to embrace an expanded array of planning behaviours. All this needs to begin at the local level, by opening conversations on how planners experience their professional roles, where these generate conflicts with their personal side and limit their effectiveness, and how they may work through these dilemmas.

Underlying this issue is a maxim familiar to some professions but new to ours: planner, know thyself. Enhanced awareness of one's personal predispositions toward planning, and appreciation of different others the planner works for and with, is more than just an aid to effective practice; it's a necessity, a form of what Stephen Covey calls "synergistic communication" (1990, 264). As people open their minds, hearts and expressions to new dimensions of themselves and others, the way also opens to new possibilities and potentials that would not otherwise exist for individuals, groups, organizations and communities.

Admitting the rational and arational and bringing the whole self (or at least more of it) to the work of planning means taking along our minds *and* hearts. Risky, maybe, but so is splitting the self and suppressing important parts of it. A fuller form of professional practice promises to be more professionally relevant and more personally fulfilling.

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Endnotes

¹ Diane Santo (1992, 24), MCIP, reflecting on eleven years as a member of the Ontario Municipal Board, observes, "Planners as individuals have not been able to develop a real sense of professionalism."

² Don May, Chair of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute's Discipline Process Review Committee, equates offering independent professional opinion with being impartial and objective (1998, 27).

³ OPPI President Valerie Cranmer (1998, 13) describes a recent ruling that disqualified as expert witness a professional planner whose appearance of independence had been compromised because that individual was employed by the law firm representing a party to the hearing. In Cranmer's view, the disqualification had to do with "the fundamental differences between lawyers (who have a professional responsibility to act as advocates) and planners (who have a responsibility to offer independent objective advice)." According to Diane Santo (1992, 25), a professional planner must not be an advocate; acting in this capacity severely diminishes the planner's credibility and tests the tribunal's patience.

⁴ CIP's 1998 membership roster shows half of its members working for governments; altogether, two-thirds are employed in the public or nonprofit sectors. This is a far cry from the classic independent professional freely serving a client.

⁵ Planning has been characterized as "rational mastery of the irrational." According to this view, rationality applied to the self involves control over impulses (Friedmann 1987, 102).

⁶ The source, anthropologist Angeles Arrien (1993, 111), finds this meaning to be common in non-Western cultures.

⁷ Evans (1979, 213) calls this the interpenetration of the public and private spheres. She cites Charlotte Bunch: "There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal. The old barriers have fallen."

⁸ Opportunities to take the MBTI regularly occur in workshops in larger cities across Canada. A useful general reference is Kroeger and Thuesen (1988).

⁹ The other three preference pairs revealed by the MBTI are: focus of attention and source of energy, either the external world of people and events (Extraversion) or the internal world of mind and experience (Introversion); taking in and attending to information, either through Sensation which focuses on what exists and relies mainly on the immediate and direct experience of the five senses, or through Intuition which depends more on a sixth sense (hunches, gut feeling, insights) and goes beyond the concrete and observable to seek latent possibilities in objects and events; and dealing with the outside world, either in a planned and orderly manner (Judging) or flexibly and spontaneously (Perceiving).

¹⁰ Adapted from Barger and Kirby (1995, 30-31). In the 38 MBTI workshops I have conducted or attended in the past 13 years, these T/F differences invariably show up.

¹¹ My sample of 53 strategic planners in Ontario, over half of them members of OPPI, found 28% Sensing, 72% Intuitive, 79% Thinking and 21% Feeling (Lang, 1995, 203-213).

¹² In my sample this was even true for women (25 of the 53). They preferred Thinking twice as commonly as Feeling, the opposite of the general population where roughly two-thirds of women are Feeling types (the reverse is true for men).

¹³ Sandercock (1998, 80). Claiming that planners have an aversion to local knowledge, which they see as "tainted" by self interest and "by the passions, whether greed, love, attachment, anger, faith, power, prestige, beauty," she adds, "I believe that many planners, because of their positivist training, are afraid of the presence of these emotions in the community, do not know how to deal with their eruption in the midst of what is meant to be rational deliberation, and therefore choose to hide behind the apparent safety and alleged objectivity of data."

¹⁴ This isn't a novel idea; e.g., it appeared in John Friedmann's (1973) concept of "mutual learning" where people's ordinary/personal knowledge is exchanged with planners' professional knowledge and where "thinking, moral judgment, feeling and empathy merge in authentic acts of being" (Albrecht 1985, 47).