

Re-Imagining Planning

By Reg Lang (in progress)
© Reg Lang 2003-2004

This book is aimed at anyone who undertakes planning at work, in/for organizations and communities. That includes professional planners, managers and leaders for whom planning is a necessary function, as well as people who occasionally are called upon to wear a planning hat, along with planning educators and students.

My assumption is that much planning, whether or not practitioners are aware of it:

- is intendedly rational (intent precedes informed action), excluding the emergent (intent revealed *through* action)
- tends to be top-down, expert-driven and exclusive
- privileges one approach to reality, one way of knowing and one form of knowledge (professional/scientific)
- is mainly deterministic (cause-effect) and reductionist (essentially analytic)
- underplays intuition, emotion and other modes of extra-rationality; ignores the role of personality at work
- as a consequence, is limited in its validity and usefulness, especially under conditions of rapid change, high uncertainty; and increasing complexity.

It's not that such planning is altogether wrong; an intendedly rational approach is appropriate under certain conditions. Rather, conventional planning is incomplete. Planners' practice repertoires are liable to be insufficient to address the array of

issues they encounter. The danger is that they will use the approaches they know best, however inappropriate, or narrowly define problems to fit their limited mental models. This can have dire consequences for the plans, strategies and actions that result. It can also lead to planning losing legitimacy – already evident in much of the organizational literature – and to planners being sidelined. That's unfortunate because planning, of one form or another, is unavoidable. The issue is whether it's situationally inappropriate.

For planning to become more "complete" will require planners to:

- expand their repertoire of available planning approaches. The book outlines five planning-process "frames": planning process as rational, strategic, communicative – collaborative, adaptive-learning, and contingent
- become more adept at "reading" contexts, applying combinations of approaches, and overcoming barriers to the matching of planning approach with context
- be aware of their in-built preferences for certain ways of planning and be able to use this knowledge effectively in their work
- bring the full range of inputs to and engage the whole self in their planning work.

Conventional planning is incomplete. Planners' practice repertoires are liable to be insufficient to address the array of issues they encounter. The danger is that they will use the approaches they know best, however inappropriate, or narrowly define problems to fit their limited mental models. This can have dire consequences for the plans, strategies and actions that result. It can also lead to planning losing legitimacy.