

Creativity and Organizational Change

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Abstract

For many people, planning is related to goal setting and finding means to achieve these goals. The goals have to be formulated as clearly as possible. The means have to be selected in such an accountable way that an outsider-expert will be able to trace and accept the strategic arguments, and that the planning can be evaluated afterwards.

Such a perspective on planning is restricted and contested. There exists a vast literature on the pitfalls of this planning-ideal (Argyris, 1994, Mintzberg, 1994, Pepper, 1995, Dörner, 1997). The basic idea behind much of this criticism is that this kind of means-end planning overrates the predictability of the planning situation. The world is too dynamic and too complex to fit with even the most elaborated means-end planning. We have to find other ways to organize and control our activities. So, over the last twenty years, many scholars have felt challenged to develop alternative planning models.

In this paper, we will focus on one specific aspect of different planning models: the function and use of creativity. Creativity is the source for new competing ideas, with which an organization gains position in its environment. Planning as such cannot deliver these ideas. By its stress on ex ante and ex post evaluation, it can only prevent the application of wrong ideas. Therefore, planning needs creativity as a counterpart, in order

to guarantee results. And, of course, this works the other way around; without planning, many creative ideas will not be exploited in an effective way.

The main issue here is the intrinsic relationship between types of planning and types of creativity. Using this, we will try to balance new ideas about planning with new ideas about creativity, showing how the benefits of such create a fit with a dynamic world.

We will start with a short description of two perspectives on planning that fundamentally differ from each other. As a presupposition we assume that alternative ways of planning, at odds with strict means-end thinking, are not to be viewed upon as anti-planning ideas, but as new and proper methods of planning in certain situations.

We suppose that these alternative methods are related to views on change. Change is often considered in an instrumental way: that we create change by well-programmed interventions. There are other ways of approaching change, as we will show, and these will influence our view on planning.

Then we will move to creativity. Creativity will be considered in different models of planning and change. In the means-end planning scheme, creativity is mainly a problem solving activity, to find the ideal mix of instruments to achieve a clearly stated goal. As we will demonstrate, creativity can be much more, if we accept other ideas about planning.

We will end up by making this broadened concept of creativity more explicit, pointing to strategic devices to promote and facilitate creativity in an organization.

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