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Emergent Program Planning as Competent Practice: The Importance of Considering Context

Mary Katherine O'Connor
F. Ellen Netting

ABSTRACT. Built on the assumption that both rational and nonrational thought go into problem solving, but only rational approaches have been presented as appropriate technology for program development, this article offers an alternative way of designing social programs. We call this approach "emergent planning." Our aim is to provide a conceptualization of planning processes that will be useful regardless of culture, mission or goals of the human service organization within which planning and service occur. Our hope is to deconstruct what constitutes rational thinking in program planning in order to critically consider alternative ways of thinking and planning within the context of multiculturalism and globalization. The goal is recognition of a subjugated model of planning so that those who do not plan rationally are not automatically assumed to lack competence to engage in "real" planning and effective problem solving. doi:10.1300/J059v18n02_05 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Program planning, rational/nonrational thought, emergent planning

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Most creative approaches to social development recognize *both* the universality of social problems such as violence, hunger, gender and racial discrimination, and environmental degradation *as well as* their uniqueness in each country. Yet this recognition that most social problems may look different in each country, albeit connected to each other and to the global economy, rarely inspires different responses to addressing social problems at the programmatic level. Theoretically, planners recognize and respect different contexts; but when it comes to the overall work, there are a limited number of dominant technologies superimposed in the planning and implementation processes throughout the world. It is as if the Western approach to problem solving, living by plans, must always supercede the alternative way, living by hope.

Here we introduce what we call an "emergent" model of program planning that allows for differential responses at the local level. Our emphasis will be on program planning with its implications for implementation or evaluation. Our aim is to provide a broader conceptualization of planning processes and skill packages that can expand choices regarding what will be useful, regardless of the culture, mission or goals of the human service organization within which planning and service occur. This additional model may be especially congruent with cultural approaches to human service delivery in non-Western environments, but its presence is clearly evident in the multicultural Western world as well.

Our perspective is built on the assumption that both rational and non-rational thought go into problem solving, but that only rational approaches have been presented or packaged as the appropriate technology for program development. Note that we are not speaking of irrationality, but of thought processes that have form and function that are either linear and reductive or circular and holistic. Our intention is to offer an alternative way of designing social programs. In doing so we encourage the consideration of how exporting social planning models and social programs built on rational modeling across national and cultural borders has the potential to oppress because traditional program planning represents only one world view, the Western one, operationalized at the program level. Our hope is to help readers take advantage of alternative opportunities instead of simply assuming that in a global economy regardless of the culture or level of development, those who do not plan rationally represent lack of competence to engage in "real" planning and effective problem solving. We believe it is important to recognize that there may be multiple ways of competently engaging in program planning and emergent planning adds to the possibilities.

DEFINITIONS

Before considering various planning models, we must acknowledge the impact of terminology and language. Here we are specifically focusing on "human service programs." Programs should not be confused with organizations, generally understood to be "social unit[s] with some particular purpose" (Shafritz & Ott, 2001, p. 1). From our perspective, in human services, individuals gather together to serve a particular purpose and that purpose is served through operationalizing programs. Organizational goals are achieved because programmatic tasks are completed by a collective of individuals able to achieve something more and better than that which could be achieved by a single individual. So, for the most part, programs develop within the cultural and technological context of organizations and, of course, organizations develop within larger cultural and technological contexts. Sometimes, however, a program develops in response to a need and prior to the organization in which it is eventually housed. To some degree, then, the difference between a program and an organization is the degree of structural complexity that surrounds activities geared towards "the enhancement of the social, emotional, physical, and/or intellectual well-being of some component of the population" (Brager & Holloway, 1978, p. 2).

Defining Programs and Projects

In traditional, rational program planning it is assumed that there is a clear understanding of what constitutes a program and what does not. Programs are "pre-arranged sets of activities designed to achieve a set of goals and objectives" (Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 2004, p. 327). *Direct service* programs focus on clients, whereas *staff development and training* programs target staff by providing additional knowledge and skills for better direct service provision. *Support* programs are intended to assist direct service or staff development and training programs (Netting & O'Connor, 2003, p. 296). Finally, *advocacy* programs are geared to "systematically influence decision making in an unjust or unresponsive system" (Schneider & Lester, 2001, p. 64) by facilitating either case (individual) or cause (collective) problem solving.

The terms "program" and "project" are often used interchangeably in practice, but they are defined differently in textbooks. "Projects are much like programs but have a time-limited existence and are more flexible so that they can be adapted to the needs of a changing environment. Projects, if deemed successful and worthwhile, are often

permanently installed as programs" (Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 2004, p. 327).

Note the assumptions embedded in the definitions presented. First, programs are "pre-arranged" implying that someone has the capacity to predict the future or at least reasonably determine what needs to happen. Second, there are "sets of activities" which assumes at least a minimal complexity in which various elements are connected and must occur, rather than one set of actions. Third, these activities are targeted to "a set of goals and objectives," the achievement of which would reveal whether the program "works." The proliferation of books on program evaluation attest to this model, in which the very nature of effectiveness-based or performance-based or outcomes-based program planning means determining *in advance* where one is going and what one plans to achieve. Projects, on the other hand, are assumed to be more short term, based on a bit more uncertainty, and flexible enough to adapt to what is learned in process. According to the given traditional definitions, projects likely aspire to become programs and only then would they acquire "real" status.

However, we are suggesting that the concept of "project" has its own problem-solving power and when assessed from an alternative perspective may be congruent with emergent or nonrational programs that neither seek, nor necessarily "should" seek, to become rational programs. All of this raises the possibility that even the definition of program masks assumptions that may script the planning process. To understand the complexity contained within the planning process, we now turn to the concepts of rational and nonrational thought to provide the context in which these different approaches to program and project planning seem to have developed.

Rational and Nonrational Thought Defined

Early empiricists such as Locke, Berkley, and Hume, join the Vienna Circle in influencing the development of logical empiricism and logical positivism, in establishing that the true basis of knowledge rests on empirical or evidence-based verification rather than simply on personal experience. As scientific methods developed in natural science, these methods were transferred and applied to human agency. From Comte and other positivists active in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there has developed a belief that all genuine human knowledge is contained within the boundaries of science, the systematic study of phenomena and the explication of laws embodied therein. Induction,

defined as making inferences of a generalized conclusion from particular instances, became the preferred method of consolidating the observational link between science and reality. Deduction is a method by which knowledge, inductively generated, is applied to other empirical situations not yet observed. Induction, going from the general to the specific, became clearly preferred over deduction.

As a derivative of this philosophy of science and its application to the study of human nature, reason is assumed to guide both human behavior and one's coming to understand it. According to Fay (1996), for the rationalists, "to explain human actions is to provide their rationale; and to provide their rationale is to show how they were the rational thing to have done given agent's beliefs and desires" (p. 92). This assumes that human agents are rational: that they engage in certain inferential processes and act on that basis. Notice that this should be contrasted with the possibility that an agent might act intentionally on the basis of a reasoning process that is itself illogical (in that the premises do not warrant the conclusions) and, thus, produce an act that is irrational. As this argument stands, there is no problem with the characterization until one deconstructs what is assumed to constitute rational thinking. Based on the reductionistic goals of positivism, a linear approach to reason became *Reason*. It is only with the postmodern critique of positivism and the entrance of more interpretive epistemologies that nonrational, nonlinear thought has been embraced as a valid way of systematically coming to know.

The modern positivist and post-positivist perspective is characterized by a concern for providing explanations of the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction, and actuality. It tends to be realist, determinist, and nomothetic. In its overall approach it seeks to provide essentially rational explanations of social affairs. It is pragmatic, problem-oriented, seeking to apply the models and methods of the natural sciences to the study of human affairs. It tends to assume that the social world is composed of relatively concrete empirical artifacts and relationships which can be identified, studied and measured through approaches derived from the natural sciences (Rodwell, 1989). A more linear reasoning is appropriate, given these assumptions.

This linearity in reasoning dominated the development of organizational theory as it evolved from organizing during modern industrialization. Thus, it is not surprising to find the philosophical assumptions introduced above embedded in the theories that dominated organizational thinking for decades. And at the programmatic level, the assumptions of rational planning reverberate by requiring one to move forward as

if prediction is possible in the face of human diversity. However, Hasenfeld (2000) criticizes the rational model of organizations as being "theoretically weak and empirically untenable." He goes on to say that "One can also readily see how a rational model fails to take into account the unique attributes of human service organizations, [faltering] in the face of multiple and conflicting goals and the existence of indeterminate service technologic" (p. 92).

In contrast to a positivist or post-positivist approach, an interpretive perspective is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is and the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks to understand through individual consciousness and subjectivity, within participants', rather than observers', frames of reference. The approach tends to be nominalist, antipositivist, voluntarist and ideographic. In interpretivism the social world is an emergent social process created by the individuals concerned. Social reality is little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings. There is no generalizable truth, so there is an orientation toward obtaining an understanding of the subjectively created social world as it is in terms of an ongoing, ever-changing process. From this different standpoint, a more circular approach to reason is appropriate and useful (Rodwell, 1989).

Interpretive approaches have been labeled as alternative, nontraditional and nonrational because they include a logic that is not so much nonlinear as circular, able to consider even the most tangential aspects of a thought process. This approach to thought is based on the assumption of multiple, competing truths where knowledge and decision making must include multiple understandings achieved through no fixed sequence of analytic steps. This approach is highly attentive to power and politics with an understanding that context influences what constitutes a reality. Decision making, therefore, must be more tentative, based on influences and the hope of getting what is "good" while avoiding what is "bad." However, there is a recognition that "good" and "bad" depend on the context, so what is at issue is making sense of paradox and politics within the time and place of the decision making. Reasoning, then, is more by metaphor and analogy rather than by "if/then" statements. Decisions emerge by a more fluid and circular route.

To serve as the basis of the planning processes we will be investigating, we distinguish between rational (linear) and nonrational (nonlinear) thought by providing a comparison of the basic premises for each (see Table 1). Rational thought is based on the assumption that there exists a single, immutable truth and that truth can be discovered, as well

TABLE 1. Rational/Nonrational: Comparison of Thought Processes for Planning

Rational	Nonrational
Single truth	Multiple, competing truths
Thoughts constructed through series of well-defined steps	Thoughts must include multiple understandings
Steps follow fixed sequence	No fixed sequence of analytic steps
Process linear	Process nonlinear
Based on market (biggest bang for the buck)	Based on power and politics
Most benefit, least cost	Context is everything
Decisions based on objectivity and determinant rules	Decisions based on influence
Goal: Prediction based on objectives, alternatives, consequences	Goal: Getting what is "good" and avoiding what is "bad"
Decisions from selecting alternatives and minimizing objections	Making sense of paradox and politics
Reason as the basic building block	Reasoning by metaphor and analogy
Decisions made with assumptions of precision and linearity	Decisions made with clarity and reason, but more fluid and circular

Adapted from Fauri, Netting, & O'Connor (2005, p. 105).

as most decisions can be made, through a series of well-defined steps that follow a fixed, linear sequence. It assumes that decisions are determined by an assessment of the most benefit for the least cost, and are based on objective and determinant rules that allow predictions of costs and benefits and assessment of alternatives including consequences. Reason is the basic building block for selecting among alternatives and minimizing objections. This is possible owing to the reductionism of the "if/then" dimensions of linearity.

Nonrational approaches recognize a multiplicity and complexity in truth where understanding, but not control, is possible. Nonrational decision-making is context embedded and attentive to power and influence such that no fixed process or set of analytic steps will be useful at all times. Instead, it is through metaphor and analogy that clarity emerges from a back-and-forth process of both induction and deduction where the goal is finding what is best in a particular situation while avoiding what might be bad. From this perspective, everything is important and must be considered to make the best decisions. This is possible through comprehensive, fluid, circular thought.

Given the differences between rational and nonrational thought, it seems that attention to the more positivistic goals of understanding and

controlling historic influences or the unexpected or chaotic in the planning process would be at the base of the more traditional rational planning model. The emergent, more nonrational model, attends to the political and the contextual through more collaborative or hermeneutic processes. For us, the expert dominated traditional model makes full participation of all stakeholders difficult. It also inculcates a tradition of top-down hierarchy and bureaucratic models of organizing that may be antithetical to the culture in which a human service program is planned. We think it is important to know when an alternative model can provide guidance for clarity in planning, while assuring participation of all stakeholders in a context-sensitive manner. We believe that it is at this level the possibility of socially just global development exists.

But further, and in line with Hasenfeld's (2004) and others' criticism of the rational model, there are scholars who have spent years studying how seasoned managers perform within their work environments. Given the constantly changing and evolving nature of their organizations, it is not just in the developing world that nonrational thought operates, it is clear that seasoned managers

Employ a variety of different perspectives or frames. As one set of conditions arises, they focus on certain cues that lead them to apply a very analytic and structured approach. As these cues fade, they focus on new cues of emerging importance and apply another frame, perhaps this time an intuitive and flexible one . . . the ability to see the world in a dynamic fashion does not come naturally. It requires a dramatic change in outlook, a redefinition of one's world view. It means transcending the rules of mechanistic logic used for solving well-defined problems and adopting a more comprehensive and flexible kind of logic. (Quinn, 1989, p. 4)

Essentially, this is what interpretive, nonrational or more emergent planning is all about. This may "not come naturally" in cultures steeped in rationality and positivism, but it may be very natural in other cultural contexts and should be articulated as an alternative to the traditional program planning model currently dominating assessments of accountability and fundability throughout the world.

THE TRADITIONAL PROGRAM PLANNING MODEL

In social work in the United States, the planned change model is based on a rational problem-solving approach (see Kettner et al., 1999;

Netting et al., 2004). It assumes that programs and services should be aimed at incremental or gradual change to alter people's status so that they can function best within society. The model is linear, moving from problem analysis and needs assessment through hypothesis development, setting goals and objectives, to designing programs that create either individual or contextual/structural changes that are evaluated using traditional, mostly quantitative methods.

Built on the assumptions of positivist science, problems are identified and analyzed from objective assessment data. Needs are assessed through consideration of objective data known about the identified problem. Program planning follows logically from the problem diagnosis or problem definition. First, hypotheses are developed about what is necessary to alter the problem status. Goals and objectives are derived from the "if/then" dimensions of the hypotheses about how incremental change can be achieved.

Taber and Finnegan (1980) identified basic components of program design in keeping with this problem-solving orientation. The components are as follows: analyze the social problem, determine who the direct beneficiary of the program is, determine the social work theory of helping, specify the service providers, identify the key persons required to produce client benefits, specify the helping environment, describe actual helping behaviors, and identify emotions and responses. The assumption is that planning occurs in the order that the components are presented, but that information and decisions made in subsequent steps may suggest or require alterations in previous steps. Linearity is preserved even if modifications occur.

Details about what should constitute activity in each step in the rational planning model may vary from scholar to scholar. Some advise attending to the various dimensions of the problem, while others suggest that in order for planning to occur, the problem must be translated into needs (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 1999). Some suggest that the target of change and the resources for change should be identified in connection with specific practice theory to inform the design (Rapp & Poertner, 1992), while others suggest that all this can be included in the development of a program hypothesis. The program hypothesis should frame the planning process. Kettner et al. (1999) suggest that "to deal successfully with a problem, one should modify or remove those factors associated with the condition or the etiology of the problem" (p. 76). This is based on the positivistic assumptions that independent variables when related to intervening variables produce dependent variables. A discretely defined intervention into the identified and operationalized

problem causes a result which is expected to be the elimination of the problem as defined.

Strengths and Challenges of Rational Planning

The traditional model of planning produces a clear and measurable statement of an action that allows tracking and useful information for implementation and evaluation. It is the dominant type of planning required of persons in the United States who want to receive funding for outcomes-based programs. It has also begun to become the "gold standard" for many international funding sources. Support for this type of process is evident among most funders, both governmental and private. Outcomes-based programming requires that one should know where one is going and then logically plan the steps to get there. Many resources are available to assist in writing such plans (see, for example, Ketter et al., 1999; Pawlak & Vinter, 2004).

A difficulty in rational planning is that rarely do planners have the time available to fashion the necessary precision in logic or language to achieve the standards for valid and reliable measurement, so incomplete and even incorrect information may guide the selection of outcomes. These outcomes, because they are pre-determined, can be seized upon as "Truth" and thus remain unaltered even in the face of new data. In addition, some planners may be less capable than others of the linear linguistic and cognitive processing necessary to design this type of program plan.

The traditional model also assumes that a program plan starts at the beginning, continues with a middle and ceases in an ending process. This is extremely useful for start-up activities; but most human service programming is rarely that discreet, making achieving the logic expectations of the model almost impossible to enact in fast-paced, chaotic environments. This traditional model does not lend itself to quick responses or to serendipitous opportunities. Instead, it is best suited to longer range opportunities with well-defined timelines for proposals and implementation.

The traditional model provides a picture of cool, controllable clarity rarely found in even the most developed organizational or social systems. This may be comfortable to persons who enjoy certitude, but provides a sense of false security. Because of this, assumptions may be made about quality and appropriateness of programs that are not a reflection of the lived experience of the planners, the implementers, or the recipients of the service contained in the plan. From an evaluation standpoint, type I

and type II errors remain possible because of the idiosyncrasies of statistical analysis that wash out the impact of both extremely negative and extremely positive results. Yet, strength of the model is seen in its evaluability in that a well-designed program plan will have information systems and measurements built in from the beginning.

Finally, the problem-solving model assumes and requires a type of linear logic that flows naturally from Germanic and Anglo-Saxon language patterns. For the precision required in the plan, a type of reduction is needed that is not easily present in the more circular logic of romance languages or non-Western cultures. Because of this, in order to engage in planned change or problem-solving planning, planners from non-Western languages or cultures are required to learn a different cognitive processing, in addition to the skills necessary to produce such a plan. This challenge raises a fundamental question about whether or not this change in thinking is so fundamental as to make application of this planning method inappropriate in certain situations and certain cultures or conditions.

EMERGENT PLANNING

Experience tells us that some programs, even long-lived ones, reflect norms more like those found in nonrational approaches. The programs remain flexible oftentimes because there is little choice given what they need to do to be responsive. The ambiguity with which they appear to operate may seem to fly in the face of rational planning principles. These programs predominantly do what Brody calls "forward-sequence planning" as opposed to "reverse-order planning." Forward-sequence planning begins by asking where can one start rather than what do we want as a final result, which is the focus of reverse-order planning (2000, pp. 77-78). Our recent research indicates that some programs that predominately use forward-sequence planning can be labeled "exemplary" in their communities, even when they do not have clearly defined roles and pre-conceived tasks (Netting, O'Connor, Thomas, & Yancey, 2005).

We think these projects or programs are representative of an alternative, emergent model for planning based on a nonrational model of problem solving. This model occurs when those engaged in the planning process are attentive to political and contextual idiosyncrasies that divert them from their "real" plan. Planners, steeped in rational traditions, may be reluctant to admit to this aspect of their work because it

does not conform to strict principles of rationality. But programs can be planned, implemented and are successful without traditional, rational planning. This suggests that a more emergent approach exists, can be articulated and recognized as a viable framework a program planner could use, and can still be seen as competent planning.

Following a more social constructivist theoretical context (Rodwell, 1998), the alternative view of planning, relies on a less reductionistic, more collaborative approach to decision making about problem definition, program design and implementation. Instead of the systematic data gathering of the traditional approach, an emergent process focuses on hearing multiple perspectives from diverse groups and persons as a means of information gathering. This information is usually gathered ethnographically by planners steeped in the culture of the context and with great attention to all sources of information, including intuition, word and numeric data. Quinn (1989) describes this masterful planner as engaging in "a kind of thinking that is complex, holistic, and fluid—a kind of thinking that distinguishes the master from the novice" (p. 9). Data collection tends to be both formal and informal with whatever structure that is applied being tentative and open to reformulation depending upon what is being learned in the context of the data collection. The process is emergent while being attentive to time and context.

An example of emergent planning occurred last year when one of our student interns was asked to design a program for her field agency. She wanted to address the needs of "runaway/throwaway" youth. These youth were on the street without resources, subject to the risks of drug and alcohol use, prostitution and a host of other potential situations. The local shelter that had focused on homeless youth's needs had recently closed. Other shelters in the city were open to taking in youth, but the youth had to be referred through a professional source. The student intern's assumption was that the problem of runaway/throwaway youth on the streets had not gone away, but they were even less visible now that no shelter allowed walk-ins or self-referrals. In a traditional planning process, needs assessment data would be gathered and then goals established. The difficulty here was that there was no way to gather needs assessment data in a traditional manner. Certainly one could walk the streets looking for homeless persons who appeared young, but it was hard enough to figure out how many persons were homeless in the city, much less distinguish their characteristics. If these youth existed, they were by desire not highly visible. Yet, the student persisted because she knew that the closed shelter had had a steady stream of youth who had presented for overnight stays. Without a place for them to go, without a

referral, they had simply disappeared. The intern realized that a rational approach to planning would not work here because without having data, one could not go to the next step. In a traditional planning model, going to the next step of assuming that a program needs to be developed, without having adequate data, dooms the process from the beginning. The invisibility of the population group becomes a facilitator for doing nothing. Yet, the student intern persisted. She designed an emergent program in which she obtained permission from an existing shelter to allow her to use up to two beds a night for self-referrals. The plan was for a community organizer to walk the streets and literally see who would emerge in the process.

The goal of this emergent approach is less assessment of a problem and more an understanding of the problem in all its complexity. This means that both subjective and objective dimensions of problem description are essential. Analysis is viewed as a broadening, not reducing process, so that efforts are always present to avoid premature narrowing of what constitutes the articulation of the problem of interest. The problem is defined when the participants in the investigation process say it is, and it may change when new information emerges.

The emergent model is not expert driven in the way most traditional problem-solving planning models are. There exists in this model no prescribed form of problem description or goal statement. Instead, the problem definition and the determination of what should be done about it is the result of the involvement of all those with a stake in the problem of interest or its resolution. The problem definition and the solution design are a result of a collaborative process. The problem and the acceptable solution are what is agreed upon. That in itself is interventive, owing to the mutual education that is produced as a result of an authentic planning process where all perspectives and views are encouraged and critically examined for usefulness in problem resolution.

Consensus building about the problem and the solution is the goal of this process. Because the process is steeped in an understanding of the multiple dimensions of power and politics, naiveté is avoided. Attention to the will of the polity (Stone, 1997) is essential to the sense-making about what becomes constituted as the acceptable problem definition and solution in a particular time and context. Political reasoning, not rational, cost/benefit thought is central to this planning process. In order to attend to all constituencies with a stake in the problem, acceptable planning for change is expected to be acceptable to all stakeholding groups. Compromise and consensus are the major products of the planning process. Because of this, collaboration and campaign tactics for

change within programs, organizations or social contexts constitute the standard for good practice.

Returning to the example of "runaway/throwaway" youth, consensus building and multiple stakeholder input are evident in what emerged. It was clear there was the possibility that no one would come to the shelter and nothing would happen because, perhaps, no service was needed. There was also the possibility that youth would appear. If they did, they would become a source of planning information. They would be engaged in the planning process as participants who had a critical type of expertise—potential knowledge about other youth on the streets, information on where they had stayed and who had approached them and thoughts about what would appeal to someone in their circumstances. The fluid, emergent, nondeterminate nature of the planning process was trusted. As new information emerged, the program could be redesigned to be responsive to the population group. The plan included a proviso that if the original method of locating youth did not work, the option was open to a completely different approach designed as new insights emerged.

Strengths and Challenges of Emergent Planning

Emergent planning, instead of being time intensive in its initial stages, like the traditional model, is very time intensive throughout the process. It is neither cool, nor controllable, making ongoing accountability monitoring a challenge, especially when precision only achieved through control may be required from an outside evaluative or funding source.

This alternative model is overtly political. It is attentive to the polity and attendant ideology, regardless of empirical evidence to the contrary. In some cases, it might be suggested that the alternative model supports best possible practices instead of best practices because of its extreme attention to the political will of those involved in the problem-setting and solving processes. Feasibility is at the core of decision making. We think this is much more representative of the actual planning experience within democratic societies.

This alternative is very attentive to the context bound nature of language and cognition. It protects the cultural nuances that influence both what is seen to be an acceptable problem and a viable solution to the problem. It does this by being as much process oriented as it is interested in product. Because of this, the model will not be efficient. Clearly, it sacrifices efficiencies while aiming for situational effectiveness.

Its strengths, however, lie in the inclusion of multiple perspectives in the planning process and the willingness to make changes as situations

change. Whereas this wreaks havoc when outcomes are pre-determined in a traditional evaluation, the expectation of this model is more realistic in complex programs that are attempting to be sensitive to the unique service needs of individuals. It is very pragmatic and responsive to the fluidity of life.

IMPLICATIONS

We propose that there is a place for both competent, appropriate rational program planning and the alternative, emergent planning. We suspect those places are distinguished by what one is trying to achieve based on how a problem is defined and who is defining it. Persons skilled in dealing with complexity and critical thinking, who can live with paradox and ambiguity, are likely candidates for designing and developing emergent, nonrational types of human service programs. Cultures in which nonrational thinking occurs may be particularly helpful in educating others about how to face these challenges, just as cultures steeped in rationality may be particularly helpful in incubating rational planners.

For example, staff in a faith-based NGO were witnessing a rise in child-headed households in an African country in which so many adults were being felled by AIDS. Because there were so few facilities to care for these "AIDS orphans," many of the children, especially those of sibling groups with slightly older children in addition to younger ones, were choosing to stay in their family homes, rather than become street children or go to over-populated orphanages. A European farming concern wanted to donate 2,500 baby pigs (3-5 months old) over a 3-year period, assuming that the households would raise the pig, butcher it, and then use all aspects of the butchered hog for their own consumption since pigs could be a good source of food and would provide manure to enrich depleted land. But shortly after the first 500 arrived, most of the families had other ideas. They wanted to take the pigs to market in order to liberate capital to use as they saw fit. If all 2,500 pigs went to market it would destroy the hog market in the area. It was determined that the first best action would be to curtail pig distribution from Europe altogether, but to continue the program by having the remaining cycles of pig distribution come from the offspring of the pigs initially distributed. The NGO would purchase the pigs.

putting funds in the hands of the participants while also extending the program to new participants.

In this example, well-intentioned planners respond to opportunities that have unexpected results. The initial program grows from serendipity but is conceptualized by planners in a rational way without sensing that it could be viewed by the child-headed households differently. Program planners assume simply that a pig given to a household will be used for consumption. This assumption is very rational, in that a hand-out of food is given and a need is met—the outcome for this program is a child-headed household having adequate food. However, the children seek to become part of the local economy, not simply to be passive recipients of food supplies. This decision on the part of multiple households has implications for the larger community and its hog economy. In the process of discovery that becomes part of this example, the rationale switches to an emergent process in which persons in authority begin to realize the implications of the program design and its need to change. If simply a rational process had been maintained, children would have been eligible for the program if they agreed to use the pigs for their own consumption and agreed not sell them to others.

Rational planning might label this example a "failure," whereas from an emergent process what is learned is invaluable in thinking through what might actually work better if individuals' needs were considered rather than assuming one set of interventions fits all. This example is one in which a combination of rational and emergent planning was needed. One can not mobilize the distribution of large numbers of pigs without a rational approach to detail. This distribution and oversight of pig distribution requires elements of rationality to avoid chaos. On the other hand, the interaction of children with the pigs (what they decide to do with them) is not subject to the same set of assumptions. The children see pigs as a source of income and this assumption is different from the assumption held by planners. For this context a far better approach required rethinking the intervention as it emerged and being totally prepared to redesign the program as information was gathered through experience.

We are not suggesting that one model of planning is correct and the other is incorrect. There are places for both. We think that depending upon the agency or larger cultural context in which a model is used, one model may be more congruent than the other. Cultural congruence is an important factor because program planning can not be separated from organizational, community and societal contexts. For example, currently it would be foolish for any program planner in the United States

to discount outcome-based measurement and its importance in obtaining external funding from government and United Way sources, both of which have embraced (even mandated) this rational, problem-solving approach. The student intern introduced earlier faces this dilemma in which dealing with runaway/throwaway youth in a United States city does not conform to a rational planning process. In fact, if rational planning principles are used, there is no documented need. Use of empirical evidence to convince funding sources or decision makers that something needs to happen is next to impossible. Yet the student intern is convinced that if an appropriate means of finding these youth can be devised that they will literally "come out of the woodwork"; they will emerge. She is also convinced that if she projects too far ahead, writing outcomes like "youth will return home and attend school" that such outcomes will be based on *her* reality, not the reality of the youth. In fact, until she locates a few youth who tell their stories, needs and future directions can only be fantasized. She persists because the worse case scenario for the program (but not for the youth) is that there really are no more runaways on the streets. The best case scenario for the program will be that these invisible youth have become visible and with that, where to go next has to emerge. Prematurely assuming outcomes for this program will doom it before it begins, yet trust in an emergent process is a lot to ask local providers and funding sources with rational program-planning standards in mind. Thus, for them, the "program" will likely have to begin as a temporary, short-term "project" designed to identify what happens next. Emergent planning is appropriate. The question remains whether traditional planning will ever be useful in this program.

In other parts of the world some of the same assumptions may hold based on political or accountability reasons. When stability is desired, it may be important for programs to begin to perform in highly rational ways to neutralize political pressures that have caused them to operate in a more emergent fashion. A change to a more rational way may be needed even when the more emergent model has been historically compatible with the larger cultural approach to planning.

However, application of a rational approach to problem solving may extinguish that which is powerful and unique in an alternative program. Some programs just cannot be measured and planned for by traditional means, if the program is to be sensitive to the needs of the clients or the development of the service technology. Further, by transporting Western planning processes and products into socio cultural contexts containing unique aspects of social problem elements and resources, solution alternatives by way of programs may be limited. Those limits

may make the planning selections culturally or technologically inappropriate.

In addition, we also recognize that the predominance of rational planning can force an essentially interpretive, meaning-making process between social workers and clients into positivistic measurement. In service of accountability, this approach may be taking the very elements of humane helping and quality change from the process because intimate aspects of relationship are not quantifiable. We believe this creativity and intimacy can be articulated when words are also considered to be data and when emergent planning is recognized as a respectable approach to problem solving. To accomplish this, accountability may need to be reconceptualized away from a bottom-line business model or what Freire (1994) criticized as the banking model where only deposits and profits count. Cost/benefit efficiencies may not be needed in combination with effectiveness to prove the worth of a program when the meaning of the service process can be articulated. Worth of an emergent program might be able to be captured through benchmarking the process. Formative evaluation may become as central to emergent planning as summative evaluation has developed to satisfy those concerned with appropriate use of service funds and in doing so what constitutes the gold standard of quality may be expanded to become culturally sensitive.

CONCLUSION

We close by advocating for a more expanded perspective on the program-planning process. We call for the recognition that nonrational planning is also good and effective planning. We do so based on our belief that the sociopolitical consequences of acceptance of only one model of planning, regardless of the cultural context or organizational tradition, leaving out the potential for responding to diverse human service needs or for seeing the signs that something needs to happen differently. Our goal is to open the possibility of different ways of thinking about and engaging in program planning. Our hope is that new ways to articulate competent planning and accountability will expand the possibilities and creative responses to human needs, regardless of the agency or cultural context.

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