

Technology Planning: It's More Than Computers

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Synopsis: Sharing recipes for success, on caring and feeding of the technology planning process (building, sustaining, revising, and updating existing planning documents)

Introduction

Technology Planning, as a phrase, has become used so commonly, especially in education circles, that the purity of its meaning has almost evaporated, much like alcohol spilled on a tabletop. The acute importance of technology planning has not diminished at all, however; to the contrary, it has become more critical. To understand, afresh, the crucial nature of clear, defined, defensible, well-thought-out plans requires that we humans commit ourselves to step back from the technology, itself. We must focus upon the plan, the planning, and the potential. Technology planning is a comprehensive activity, centered on a robust process, that is, indeed, much more than computers.

What Is It?

Basic to a success in technology planning lies a fresh understanding of what technology planning really is. No doubt, if you were to ask 100 people to define technology planning, you would receive a broad array of diverse explanations, ideas, suggestions, and definitions. The most common flaw might occur as these polled individuals attempted to define technology planning too narrowly—forcing the concept into the traditional mold of a *document*. Technology planning has two very appropriate aspects that deserve explanation.

Technology planning is both a noun and a verb, in form. Wise planners and leaders will examine both the noun and the verb aspects, then apply what they believe about these aspects to the overall

planning process as they attempt either to lead or just to participate in planning efforts. Closer examination of both noun-form planning and verb-form planning will result in clearer understanding.

The **noun**-form of technology planning can refer to the planning document, itself. An analogy that serves as a convenient aid to understanding is the likening of a planning document to a road map.

Maps show, quite effectively, the distances from one place to another, the type and form of infrastructure available for traversing those distances, the direction in which one is traveling, various points along the path a person would take in getting from one point to another, and a variety of other descriptive, informative matter. So, we can make very good use of this map, as a tool of beneficial information—and a much-needed aid in our navigation to our desired destination.

The **verb**-form of technology planning, however, is more important, perhaps. This form will describe the kinds of actions, attitudes, and results that are involved in the process. A key concept here is action. Using our analogy of the road map, we can say that the verb-form of planning would be the *trip*, the experience of planning. It might be possible for us to examine a road map and denote our path from New York City to Los Angeles. We could calculate the number of miles we need to travel, the specific highways we need to travel, the amount of time it will take us to make the trip, and could make note of the various points of interest along the way where we want to stop and visit. Identifying the Mississippi River, for example, on the map can be no substitute for stopping at that great body of water and running your hands through the stream, watching the various boats as they travel up and down through the currents, and listening to the boat hands who are there describing what they have witnessed as they floated their cargo enroute to their own destinations. Locating the Grand Canyon on a map is absolutely no substitute for standing at the precipice of one of those great gulfs and basking in the overwhelming grandeur of that nature!

By the same token, simply writing or reading a planning document is no substitute for the experience encountered as a group of people move together through the meaningful process of planning. The

planning document will show lists of committees, notes of thanks acknowledging people's contributions, and itemized inventories of equipment. As necessary as those things are, they pale in comparison to the importance that comes from the dynamic created by a group of people dedicated to ensuring that the application of technologies into everyday functioning of organizational members is maximized!

More than Computers?? How??

The immediate, basic reaction to a technology plan is to say, "Oh yeah, that's a report about our computers." In an optimum world, we would respond, "Not so!!" Yes, any technology plan would give *reference* to computers, but only as one component in the smorgasbord of considerations regarding technology application. Many more aspects should be included.

A technology plan should be about **people**. What better use could we make of our planning documents than to take this opportunity to discover, develop, and champion the amazing resources and talents that lie within the people who surround the school, business, or other organization for whom we are developing this plan? As the written plan lists members of various committees, this is a marvelous opportunity for us to discuss the compilation of cooperative endeavors that emerge as people engage in meaningful, informed dialogue leading to significant, positive action for a technologically-enhanced learning environment. Committees work hard to create and sustain optimized conditions for learning. Many testimonials exist that detail ways in which people have uncovered phenomenal resources within a community—resources that were thought to be either non-existent or completely out of the realm of possibility when the technology planning process began. Amazing things can happen when the creative genius of people can be released to accomplish common goals. When we see such events as they roll out, we witness a thing of beauty, indeed!

People make up **communities**; thus, technology planning can be used as a natural catalyst for community-wide activity and involvement. When such magic occurs, we find it easier to recognize that the focus is not on the computer at all. Rather, it is upon the collective strength inherent among individuals who bring their gifts to bear on a common set of goals. Often, we hear reference to the term, “community of learners.” Certainly, a bold technology planning effort, incorporating computers and other technologies, has the potential of building, strengthening, and sustaining learners through networks and events that embody the concept of community. Many stories exist of young learners who, through email and other computing-enhanced activities, were brought closer to the elderly of their community and were empowered to learn seemingly small facts about their communities that might have gone unnoticed, had not the structure for inculcation been laid out as an integral part of the robust technology plan.

One of the rare beauties of technology planning is the **process**. On the surface, the process might not appear so glamorous, especially to the novice planner. To the contrary, though, when the process, itself, is treated with great care by the technology planning committee chairperson and the central planning committee, the rewards from the process can be magnificent in scope and quantity. It might be easy to ignore the process, but if this occurs with reckless abandon, the rewards that are reaped will be harmful and, perhaps, irreparable. Those who are responsible for guiding the technology planning are well-advised to spend significant time (both in quantity and in quality), working harmoniously, to ensure that the process is a key, integral, well-protected part of their comprehensive technology planning activity.

People, communities, and process are extremely important components of technology planning. When these individual entities work well, we see positive results. However, the truly massive beauty comes forth when we stop to examine all the vast **interactions** that occur when the components are worthy, optimally. Technology planning is far more exciting, and yields far more impressive—and

satisfying—results when we witness people working aggressively, as parts of collective communities, through a “well-oiled” process to accomplish vision and mission goals that have been built because of fruitful interactions. Another dimension of the interaction phenomenon can be observed when students, empowered by effective technology implementation plans, learn new ways to interact with each other—and with new peers they meet as a result of using the technology connections—that lead to explosive intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Yes, technology planning involves far more than just computers! Educational institutions, especially, seek evidence of **progress** continuously. No doubt, significant, positive progress is evidenced as the *interactions of people*, formed into various types of *communities*, engaged in a healthy *process* become manifest. Caste systems are expelled and human capital is leveraged as technology planning occurs with these principles kept as central foci.

Conclusion

So, what advice can we draw from recognizing the truth of the previous concepts? What information can we use to craft a new “set of our sails”? How can we apply what we know to the situation in which we find ourselves? What important strategies will we develop as a result of acknowledging the truth we see?

Each situation is unique. Wise planners can, however, marshal the positive powers within their own organizations to scrutinize the planning, the process, the people, the resources, and the desired results of their technology plans (both noun and verb) so that a winning scenario can become a reality. Sometimes, one of the key elements—a key tool—in the planner’s arsenal is pure, simple *honesty*. This means that planners must commit themselves to shed any defensive feelings they might have, or be threatened to adopt, as they examine their particular situation. True, sustainable

growth comes from facing the honest reality of a condition, then working together to build a strategy for guaranteed success.

Technology planners must recognize the power of computers; however, they must know that technology involves so much more than the boxes, wires, and switches of hardware. Then, they must work deliberately to make sure this realization is manifested in the words of their written technology planning document and is evidenced in the words and actions of their verb-form technology action plan. The great philosopher, Earl Nightingale, stated, "***We become what we think about!***" If we planners keep these concepts in the forefront of our minds and we keep them as essential components of our technology planning and implementation philosophy, we are sure to achieve great success!