

Planning Possibilities

News & views brought to you by Michelle Coussens

Welcome to my January 2019 Issue!

*'Tis the season to take stock, populate our calendars, and set new goals for the brand new, shiny year. If you are like me, you thrive on "to do" lists. One "crutch" I have found to be helpful is bulletjournaling (check out bulletjournal.com to learn more about its methodology). I vary a bit from the technicalities recommended, but I have page-numbered notebook, with an index in the front, and I have pages devoted to a variety of different topics, both personal and professional. For instance, I have a page for each month's calendar of events and reminders. I have a page for daily task lists. I have a page with a list of things I need to do each quarter (and each month and each week). I have a "Future Log" that highlights key items I need to note for future months. I have an exercise log, a "to read" log, a "did read" log, a crafts to do list, things to buy list, people to see (you may be on it!), shows to watch (that should probably say "binge-watch"), quotes, gift ideas, a fun list, Podcasts to listen to, and even a page that tracks the size of my email folders. I could go on, but you get the idea. **What's in your bulletjournal, actually or figuratively?***

*Here's to the promise of a new year,
Michelle*



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Planning for Good Decisions

PLAN B CONSULTING MISSION STATEMENT

To assist organizations in becoming more effective and efficient through practical business planning, resulting in meaningful and measurable outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Prepare
Communicate
Execute

In many of today's work environments, people work together on projects collaboratively, or even interdependently. This affects how an organization and its functions are structured and organized. The combined uniqueness and finite duration of projects further complicates organizational structure, as such cross-functional projects create authority and responsibility overlaps, confusion, and sometimes, even controversy. Learn more about matching structure and strategy on page two.

Matching your structure to your strategy

I cannot tell you how many times I see organizations change or update their priorities and projects but neglect to simultaneously address their organizational structure. These are not two completely independent considerations, but rather they go hand in hand. An organizational structure delineates how certain activities are directed in order to achieve goals and includes reporting relationships, roles and responsibilities, as well as the flow of information and other communication. In considering what structure makes sense, there are many different ways to go. Here are just a few:

- **Functional:** The functional organization can be used when a particular area plays a dominant role in completing the project or has a dominant interest in the success of the project.
- **Divisional:** This is most applicable to relatively large organizations. Under this structure, each business unit, product line, or even geographic location operates as a mini-company, accountable for its resources and income.
- **Projectized:** Instead of being aligned by function or division, people report up through project teams, reporting solely to a respective project manager. This most applies when there are significant, long-term projects.
- **Matrix:** Here, a cross-functional organizational structure is overlaid on top of the normal functional structure, resulting in two chains of command and multiple tracks of work.

Planning Predicaments: Do you have to be nice, kind, or both?

*Where
planning
concepts
meet
reality*

You might interchange the terms “nice” and “kind,” thinking they mean the same thing when they actually are *not* synonyms. According to Merriam-Webster, being nice is about being agreeable and pleasing. Being kind, however, is about being sympathetic and helpful (and I would substitute “empathetic” rather than sympathetic).

Given those definitions, should we be nice in the workplace? Should we be kind? Should we be both? Do both always apply? Are there times when neither should apply? The next time someone describes you as “nice,” you may want to consider what that really means. Based on the definition, it could be intended as a compliment, but does that mean that it is best for the organization? For you?

Online Plug of the Month



Are you familiar with appreciative inquiry? A simplified definition focuses on leveraging what is positive in new and heightened ways (rather than focusing on problems and weaknesses).

The website below is a valuable resource to learn more. In addition, they have an online newsletter. Their most recent one emphasized capturing learnings from the past year; identifying the associated strengths that underpin your recent accomplishments; meditating using words or phrases that represent those strengths; and, in setting this new year’s goals, building in opportunities to celebrate moments of progress along the way.

Check out:
<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/>

Communication Corner

Does structure provide sanity? It might not guarantee it, but it certainly can’t hurt! Having a structured approach to building in communication touchpoints can help ensure that messages are accurately conveyed to relevant stakeholders in the right way, and at the right time. This requires communication channels to be identified and used strategically. Rather than treating communication as a predominantly organic activity, you should incorporate a communication plan into your short-term and long-term plans.

Identify your internal and external audiences, as well as how they take in information. Meld that with the intentions of the message in selecting an appropriate channel, as well as with whether the message should be delivered individually or collectively, and whether the message is anticipated to be received favorably.

It might sound manipulative, but if you don’t carefully strategize communication, it may derail even the best of business plans.



Book Banter

The Art of Choosing, by Sheena Iyengar, 2010, Hachette Book Group.

This book falls into my wheelhouse of topics used in various training forums and consulting efforts, but it certainly pertains to my personal life, as well. I knew many of the concepts and case studies referenced in it already, but I still found the reinforcement of them helpful. In addition, there were some additional ways of considering this thing called "choice" that I found useful, as noted below.

In line with the concept of locus of control often noted in leadership and organizational behavior-related resources, I found the author's words took the concept much beyond its typical characterization: "There's a suffering that comes when persistence is unrewarded, and then there's the heartbreak of possible rescue gone unrecognized" (p. 5). While many sources focus on the extremes of complete control over one's destiny versus the other extreme of victim syndrome, this quote caused me to consider that it is possible, and at least as important, to consider the blend of deliberate, proactive forging forward with the complement that that does not ensure others' responses, support, and recognition of such efforts. I also found her later discernment of "freedom from" and "freedom to" as a reminder to me of the significant ways to bracket the range of choice between protection from harm to the other bracket end of access to options. They are indeed, very different aspects of choice beyond the simplistic locus of control model.

Additionally, having the ability, access, and disposition to choose can detrimentally supersede the importance of the actual choices themselves, as well the value of the time and effort taken to explore said choices. And, consciously focusing on the plethora of daily choices in front of us can actually overwhelm us, essentially having the opposite effect of control that the perception of choice in its abstract may suggest.

While Western culture and its associated philosophy holds the premise of choice as a birthright and its effects as foregone conclusion, it also by default dismisses other cultures' collectivist mindsets that believe that choice can guarantee decisions, but not results. Western culture in reality may be seen by other cultures as overconfident in comparison to their views that each person is but one voice in a communal choir of change and outcome.

I particularly appreciated the discussion of uniqueness versus similarity to others. As the author points out, the answers to the following two questions should be the same, but often are perceived differently: "How similar are you to others?" and "How similar are others to you?". However, to me, the difference in answers that occurs may be as much attributed to an individual's perception of superiority in addition to any cultural pressures of valuing uniqueness.

Read my full review of the book at: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/2625459862>.

Personally Yours

We are all works in progress, certainly myself included. In moments of challenge, I remind myself of this to endure. In times of achievement, I refer to it in order to avoid resting on my laurels. No matter what I accomplished in the previous year, there is always more that I can learn, do, and experience. That is how I approach each year, and 2019 is no exception.

In moving forward, I continue to expand my networking contacts and business opportunities, and ultimately my contributions to my industry and community. I am trying new ways to create a healthier personal lifestyle, both physically and emotionally. And, I am examining relationships in my life to surround myself more with those who can make me a better person, and who can sometimes even save me from myself!

As you continue to evolve, how are you exploring and pursuing your opportunities for progress?



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- Strategic facilitation of the planning process
- Board retreat facilitation

This newsletter is intended to provide useful information but should not be construed as legal or financial fact, advice, or opinion.

Coming in February...

- * **Planning for the right type of management**
- * **Book discussion of The Enigma of Reason, by Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, 2017, Harvard University Press.**
- * **And more!**



Have an idea or comment to share? Have a topic suggestion or planning question? Send it in! I would love to hear from you!

Be My Guest/Reader Feature

Have a planning success or horror story? Have some tips for others? I would love to feature you. If you are interested in being included in a future newsletter, let me know if you would like to write a guest column or be interviewed.

UPCOMING TRAINING & SPEAKING EVENTS

- * **02/04/19-02/05/19: Strategic Thinking, American Management Association, Dallas, TX, register at www.amanet.org.**
- * **02/07/19-02/08/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL register at www.amanet.org.**
- * **02/11/19-05/13/18: Organizational Behavior (online), College of DuPage, register at www.cod.edu.**
- * **02/21/19-02/22/19: Strategic Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at www.amanet.org.**
- * **02/25/19-02/26/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Lake Buena Vista, FL, register at www.amanet.org.**
- * **03/19/19-05/07/19: Leadership (hybrid, Tuesday night class), College of DuPage, register at www.cod.edu.**

Email me for details!