

Synthesis of Environmental Scanning

Q1. What was the purpose of Environmental Scanning?

Most of those interviewed believed that the purpose of scanning was to find information relevant to the strategic planning process, to identify trends which might impact the college, and to feed this information into the planning process.

Q2. What was the process used in Environmental Scanning?

In the first round of scanning, large groups of people throughout the college were part of committees which scanned materials for information relevant to the college. These individuals were supposed to produce abstracts of relevant articles which were then discussed in monthly committee meetings. Some respondents recalled that these abstracts were then turned over to an individual who distributed them to the various groups responsible for college planning.

Those who were involved in the second round of scanning reported that the new process involved only one committee rather than several. Individuals on the committee were responsible for scanning journals, and abstracts of relevant articles were produced and circulated among committee members for review and discussion. Periodically, the committee produced a newsletter outlining general trends impacting the college.

Q3. What do you feel Environmental Scanning accomplished?

Most interviewees felt that while the process was successful in bringing information to planning groups at first, it eventually died as internal changes and reorganization of council structures occurred. Some respondents believed that scanning might have accomplished something at the individual level, few believed it had a significant or lasting impact on the college as a whole.

Did the process help you accomplish your day to day responsibilities?

Respondents felt that some of the information produced was helpful to them individually, but recognized that these benefits were probably limited to those with direct involvement in the committees. Most agreed that scanning information was never really integrated into disciplines or departments. Others noted that making changes based on scanning information was often difficult due to the organizational structure and culture of the college. Finally, some felt that there was no good place for scanning information to be discussed, and for this reason, scanning's impact on individuals outside the committee structure was limited.

In comparing purpose to results, to what extent was it successful?

Most believed that scanning had few positive results, due to the fact that the information did not consistently make its way into decision-making arenas. Some felt that the scanning committees did not do an effective job of highlighting issues which were critical to the college, while others believed that those in leadership roles did not take responsibility for disseminating scanning information to groups involved in decision-making at the college.

What about Environmental Scanning was not successful? What caused the problems with the model?

Many of those interviewed felt that the problem with the first attempt at scanning was that the even those large numbers of people were supposed to be involved in the process, very few were committed to its success. Eventually, after seeing no results, even the most committed individuals seemed to lose interest. Some believed that college politics and campus self-interest limited scanning's success, while others felt that the process itself was too cumbersome to be effective. In any case, most agreed that there was not really anywhere for the information to go once collected, and for this reason it could not be useful to people.

How could the model have been more successful at OCC?

In general, there was agreement that scanning would have been more successful at OCC had there been a better structure or mechanism for bringing the information back into the college's planning processes. In addition, some felt that college leaders would need to be comfortable with the process and must be committed to ensuring that the information be heard throughout the institution. In the past, scanning has relied too heavily on the assumption that information would filter up to groups involved in planning, even though experience proved that this rarely or ever occurred.

In your opinion, what was the purpose of environmental scanning (ES)?

- a. to find information relevant to the strategic planning process.
- b. identify trends to help posture the college in its strategic planning and future thinking.
- c. have an impact on the planning process.

In your own words, can you explain the process used in ES?

- a. groups in the college were placed on topical committees and read materials, did abstracts, shared them, met monthly to discuss them and turned the product over to a leader, who in turn submitted them to the various councils on strategic planning.
- b. a newsletter was also distributed to the college community concerning trends.

What do you feel ES accomplished?

- a. at first the information was carried from the ES Coordinating Committee to the Strategic Planning Council, because college personnel served on both, but due to internal issues and pressures and reorganization of councils, the process died a slow death.

Do you feel this process helped you in accomplishing your day to day responsibilities? Why and why not?

- a. individuals on the ES committees and sub-committees used applicable data in the classroom or in service areas, but this information was never really discussed in detail at the discipline, campus department or in college meetings. It was also hard to implement new classroom concepts, in light of the trend information, due to informal and formal controls.
- b. there was no arena available at the time, including the Academic Senate, in which to discuss say, the impact of English ASSET scores for each discipline course and the developmental course, or economic trends and college student numbers for OCC.

When you compare ES purposes to its results, to what degree do you believe it was successful

- a. little positive came out of the ES reports, because they were not used at the decision-making levels. The ES committees did not seem to highlight critical issues and relate the data to them. The leadership of the college apparently provided no systematic means of disseminating the information affecting critical decisions.

What about ES was not successful? In your opinion, what caused the problems with ES?

- a. The problem seemed to be that a group in the college, not broadbased, worked diligently at first and then after seeing their labors virtually ignored, lost interest. The politics of the college and self interests at the Campus level rendered the information useless.

How could ES have been more successful at OCC?

- a. Why was MEGATRENDS a best seller? it was marketed very well, hit the market at a very appropriate time, the author quite comfortable with his audience.
At OCC, the leader must accept and feel comfortable with the data concerning the trends, find easy ways to get it across, provide a hint at solutions using vignettes from other institutions. From there it filters down to decision-making areas. The focus groups seemed to feel that the reports would percolate up to the Planning Councils by their own virtue. It does not happen too often that way.