

1992

## Contingency Theory: A Description of Planning Practice in Rhode Island

Katia Balassiano  
*University of Rhode Island*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses>

Terms of Use

All rights reserved under copyright.

---

### Recommended Citation

Balassiano, Katia, "Contingency Theory: A Description of Planning Practice in Rhode Island" (1992). *Open Access Master's Theses*. Paper 761.  
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/theses/761>

This Thesis is brought to you by the University of Rhode Island. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons-group@uri.edu](mailto:digitalcommons-group@uri.edu). For permission to reuse copyrighted content, contact the author directly.

CONTINGENCY THEORY:  
A DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING PRACTICE IN RHODE ISLAND  
BY  
KATIA BALASSIANO

A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1992

MASTER OF COMMUNITY PLANNING  
RESEARCH PROJECT  
OF  
KATIA BALASSIANO

Approved:  
Major Professor

  
Dr. Marcia Marker Feld

Acknowledged:  
Director

  
Dr. Marcia Marker Feld

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Marcia Marker Feld, my faculty advisor, for the encouragement and enthusiasm she showed me when I first discussed this topic with her. Mark Motte and Mary Parella were helpful with their criticisms and suggestions, as well as their technical assistance. I would also like to thank several of my colleagues at CPAD for providing the intellectual stimulation and encouragement to pursue this subject, especially Julie Ross, Marty Davey, Mark Dietlin, and Nancy Melucci. And most of all, my friend and companion, Roland Nipps - who helped keep me sane throughout the two years of graduate school.

Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

There is a discrepancy between what planners in a general sense wish to accomplish and what they practice in the field. Similar to incrementalism, contingency planning threatens the widely accepted notion that planning should be rational and comprehensive. Contingency planning has no broad, long term goals and it focuses on solving problems in a short time frame. Yet, contingency may best characterize the day-to-day bureaucracy and situational compromises in which planners make decisions. This study examines contingency planning through an analysis of the current literature and by a survey of practicing planning professionals in the State of Rhode Island. The findings show that contingency theory, implemented through strategic planning, generally describes planning practice in Rhode Island.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	i
ABSTRACT . . . . .	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS . . . . .	iii
 I. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Statement of the Subject . . . . .	1
Significance of the Subject . . . . .	2
Hypothesis . . . . .	4
Principal Questions . . . . .	4
Organization of the Study . . . . .	5
 II. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction . . . . .	6
Rationality Challenged . . . . .	6
The Different Paradigms Within Contingency . . . . .	9
Rational/Empirical Root . . . . .	10
Power/Coercive Root . . . . .	14
Normative/Re-educative Root . . . . .	16
Strategic Planning . . . . .	20
Summary . . . . .	24
 III. CHAPTER THREE: QUESTIONNAIRE METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS	
Introduction . . . . .	26
Methodology . . . . .	26
Findings . . . . .	30
Follow-up Interviews . . . . .	35
Summary . . . . .	39
 IV. CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS	
Implications of the Questionnaire Responses . . . . .	40
Trends in Planning . . . . .	41
Summary . . . . .	46
 V. CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	
Summary of the Research . . . . .	48
The Future of the Planning Profession . . . . .	49
APPENDICES . . . . .	52
RESOURCES . . . . .	57

**CHAPTER ONE**



**INTRODUCTION**

## STATEMENT OF THE SUBJECT

Contingency is an anomaly when compared to other planning paradigms. Marcia Marker Feld (1990) described contingency planning as a current approach which offers more questions than guidance. Planning literature describes it as a patchwork borrowing heavily from other paradigms (Hudson:1980, Kaufman:1980). Similar to incrementalism, contingency planning threatens the mainstream definition of planning; contingency has no broad goals and focuses on solving short term problems.

Contingency theory may not qualify as a planning paradigm, given the centrist definition of planning in the United States put forth by the Planning School Accreditation Board<sup>1</sup>:

Planning is a future oriented, comprehensive process. It seeks to link knowledge and action in ways which improve the quality of public and private development decisions affecting people and places. Because of its future orientation, planning embraces visionary and utopian thinking, yet also recognizes that the implementation of plans requires the reconciliation of present realities to future states. (1991)

At first glance, contingency lacks the long term comprehensiveness that this centrist definition of planning calls for. This centrist definition of planning becomes

---

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the Planning School Accreditation Board represents the American Collegiate Schools of Planning and the American Institute of Certified Planners.



critical when comparing theory and action.

Contingency planning is a construct which posits that no single planning style can be effective without parallel input from complementary or countervailing traditions (Hudson 1980). Contingent behavior is conditional or situational, that is, behavior that would or should differ depending on the conditions present or the context.

The idea behind the contingent approach is that different situations, i.e. 'urban and physical systems', probably call for different 'planning strategies' if the planning is to be effective. (Bryson 1978:7)

The planner's role envisioned by contingency theory is that of a hybrid. The hybrid role has the advantages of both technician and politician; though, the practitioner as hybrid may decide on either a constant process of choice, or attempt to balance the inconsistencies of the two roles (Howe 1980). Every planning style has ideological gaps that can only be compensated by blending in other planning styles.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBJECT**

Planning theory is of fundamental importance to the field of planning for several reasons. Theory provides a strong basis for decision making. It allows for a deeper understanding of the roles clients and planners play in relation to one another. Theory enables planners to translate

experience into identifying and foreseeing patterns.

The field of planning theory is, among other things, designed to examine the decision making process. Decisions are intrinsic to all actions and reactions. They reflect both fact and value choices and involve the weighing of alternatives and consequences. Planning theory is therefore fundamental to the understanding and implementation of the planning process.

Through careful examination and application of various paradigms, planners can enhance their decision making abilities. Organizing categories, in the form of paradigms or theories, help articulate how we define and structure reality, creating order among chaos. Depending on which approach the planner applies to a given situation, the outcome of the issue will differ. Planning theory not only helps clarify a perspective, but often gives insights to other ways of approaching a problem.

If a planner can identify and recognize the specific paradigms that others use in decisions making, this, in turn, may prove helpful to understanding others' expectations and assumptions. This learned insight is often an advantage when sitting at a bargaining table, trying to convince various groups of the necessity of a certain plan or proposal.

## HYPOTHESIS

Despite theoretical ideals and the normative commitment of the profession to comprehensiveness, goal setting, and long range rationality, planners in the State of Rhode Island work on a day-to-day, contingency basis. The hypothesis is that contingency theory adequately describes how Rhode Island planners plan, which includes a process of strategic planning, by which decisions can be made.

## PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

Planning approaches often appear sterile when discussed in an academic setting. Examination of a specific paradigm or theory in a professional setting is an effective way of evaluating and assessing its applicability. Though not every theory or paradigm must necessarily be applicable to direct implementation, its applicability may be used as an indicator of practitioners' ideological needs.

When applying theory to practice, contingency may be the answer to "How and why do planners do what they do?" The following questions will attempt to address how contingency is theoretically and concretely implemented by the Rhode Island planning profession.

- \* What is the definition of contingency? Is it a theory, method, or paradigm, or none of the above?

- \* What are the different paradigms combined in the contingency approach? Is there one dominant paradigm?
- \* Does the contingency approach qualify as a paradigm of planning, given the centrist definition of planning in the United States?
- \* Is contingency utilized in the planning field? Is it a valuable method for decision making?

The following research has been designed to operationalize the data by linking it specifically to the principal questions as required for the analysis of the hypothesis.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine contingency theory and answer the principal questions by examining current literature, and by surveying the practices of planning professionals in Rhode Island. This study is organized into five chapters. Following the Introduction is Chapter Two which reviews the literature that will frame the hypothesis and discuss the various elements of contingency theory. Chapter Three discusses the questionnaire design and its results. Chapter Four analyzes the implications of the results and compare them to the general trends in the field of planning theory. The last Chapter summarizes the findings of the research in relation to the original hypothesis.

**CHAPTER TWO**



**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## INTRODUCTION

This literature review will link the different elements of the findings by grounding the work in a body of knowledge, and by linking the research to an existing body of theory. The outline of this chapter is as follows: challenges to the validity of the rational/empirical root; the different paradigms that comprise contingency; and contingency theory as implemented through the strategic planning process.

## RATIONALITY CHALLENGED

The classic comprehensive paradigm is faltering (Innes 1990; Kartez 1989; Beauregard 1989). Comprehensive planning, grounded in the rational/ empirical root, suggests that planning should be a logical, long term, goal oriented process. While modern comprehensive planning is still the centrist model, Christensen (1985) suggests that it is only a solution when presented with a simple problem.

Already in 1958, Simon and March proposed that actual decision-makers face

1. ambiguous and poorly defined problems;
2. incomplete information about alternatives
3. incomplete information about the baseline, the background of "the problem";
4. incomplete information about the consequences of supposed alternatives
5. incomplete information about the range and content of values, preferences, and interests; and
6. limited time, limited skills, and limited resources.

Contemporary planning problems are complicated (numerous interacting variables), interconnected (a decision in one area is affected by choices made in others), and conflictual (the values or assumptions of those involved in or affected by the decision disagree). Comprehensive planning is ill prepared to handle "messy" situations.

The ideology of science embodied in Positivism is itself a form of modern religion: a faith in pure knowledge obtained by mechanical means, and unsullied by the messiness of human language, work and jealousy. (Walker 1989: 136)

Dror (1963) was one of the first theorists who attempted to address the "messy" structure in which planning behavior takes place. He identified four major variables; the general environment of the planning process, the subject matter or issue area of the planning process, the planning unit, and the desired type of plan or outcome of the process.

Case studies show that contingency can be used for coping with uncertainty, or that given the choice, planners would handle situations on an issue-to-issue basis. For example, a study conducted by Bryson, Bromiley, and Jung (1981) suggests that the impacts of context and a varying emphasis on analytical processes will affect a program or project's outcome (1981)<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> For other case studies that test for the use of contingency theory, see Kartez (1984), Rondinelli, Verspoor, and Middleton (1984), and Meyer and Belobaba

A paradigm is an extension of the fundamental theoretical framework by which we make decisions. The breakdown of the rational, comprehensive decision making model of mainstream planning theory can be understood in part through Kuhn's work on the structure of scientific revolutions. Kuhn (1970) rejected the conventional notion that scientific breakthroughs occur through the orderly, progressive aggregation of knowledge by means of a linear chain of related studies. Galloway and Mahayni (1977) adopted Kuhn's approach to theorize about the cyclical nature of planning paradigms<sup>3</sup>.

The planning profession in the 1990's may be classified in the paradigm development stage. This stage involves exploring and pulling together different ideas and theories. Contingency serves as one of the suggested theories to replace or enhance the modern comprehensive paradigm.

The profession has come to understand that knowledge is not only made up of facts, but of values as well (Feld 1990; Innes 1990). The comprehensive paradigm is being challenged by various non-rational paradigms that acknowledge the value of qualitative data and common knowledge, and that political power is central to the planning process. Contingency is one

---

(1982).

<sup>3</sup> Galloway and Mahayni (1977) suggest that the profession explores paradigms through the following stages: pre-paradigm; paradigm development; paradigm articulation; paradigm anomaly; paradigm crisis; and then the cycle repeats itself.



of the approaches that may be considered for the paradigm development stage.

According to contingency theory (Bryson and Delbecq 1979; Hudson 1978), the role of the planner and the notion of the client change depends upon the contextual situation. Planning is not only logical and sequential but intuitive and artistic as well (Grant 1990), and should acknowledge such elements as valid in the decision making process.

But contingency seems to lack the fundamental theoretical framework that a planning paradigm usually provides. Comparing contingency theory with the comprehensive paradigm is similar to comparing two independent variables; they are inherently different in their fundamental compositions. Initially, this researcher posed the question "Is contingency a viable substitute for comprehensive planning?". Yet after preliminary findings, it was necessary to state the question differently: comprehensive planning is grounded in rational/empiricism - but what are the roots of contingency planning if the definition suggests mixing planning styles (comprehensive, progressive, interpersonal)?

#### **THE DIFFERENT PARADIGMS WITHIN CONTINGENCY**

Using seminal articles for definitions, theoretical comparisons can be conducted to examine the different elements of contingency theory - their linkages, gaps, and alternatives. All planning paradigms can be traced back to

one of three fundamental roots: rational/empirical, power/coercive, and normative/re-educative (Bennis, Benne, and Chin 1969)<sup>4</sup>.

The rational/empirical root flourished from scientific deduction, or positivism. The paradigms which are in this category share the notion that planning is a logical, sequential process that can be applied to solve any problem. The power/coercive root is based in the notion of adversary and confrontation. Finally, the normative/re-educative root is grounded in interpersonal communication and education skills. Contingency theory borrows from all three roots, making it perhaps the most complex, but possibly more fitting descriptive model compared to the other paradigms.

The matrix in Appendix A summarizes this discussion of differing planning paradigms. Paradigms and theories can be evaluated and compared in terms of postulates concerning: the client of the process, the planner's role, goals, implementation techniques, assumptions, context, seminal authors and time frame. The following narrative is a synopsis.

#### RATIONAL/EMPIRICAL ROOT

Historically, planning concentrated on physical land use and did not include social concerns. In the early twentieth

---

<sup>4</sup> Bennis, Benne, and Chin modestly call these categories "groups of strategies" as opposed to "fundamental roots".

century, many planners were architects and engineers by professional training, focusing on the physical and locational aspects of urban development. Planning was also associated with the municipal reform movement. The belief in the existence of a unitary public interest reflected a strong anti-political basis, dismissing the view that the city is a pluralistic entity. This sense of objectivity provided planners, and the planning profession, with legitimacy and respect for their technical expertise.

In 1955, Charles Haar provided a definition of classic comprehensive planning which furthered the profession's legitimacy. Haar described planning as a process that postulates the following: a unitary public interest, a hierarchy of goals, future orientation, provision of alternative choices, and citizens invited to participate in the process. Labels used to describe the same paradigm include synoptic, rational, and traditional. Since it used classification as a scientific sorting mechanism to understand phenomena, it was promoted as logical and rational and ultimately generated credibility for the profession.

Since its high point in the 1940's and 1950's, this paradigm has been transformed into what is now called modern comprehensive planning. Ernest R. Alexander is one of the theorists whose work defines this paradigm. Alexander, drawing on Friedmann and Hudson's original analysis (1974), ponders the linkage between knowledge and action. Alexander

traces planning back to utopian/utilitarianism, comprehensiveness, and the social sciences - all critical elements of the rational/empirical root.

Though the classic comprehensive paradigm varies greatly from the modern comprehensive paradigm, Alexander is not willing to break from the rational/empirical root. He suggests a modern definition of the classic paradigm, to be called substantive or value rationality. This involves evaluation and choice among goals according to an individual's or society's values. Rational analysis is still an appropriate tool in making choices dealing with standards of consistency and logic. Social choices incorporate power and influence according to Alexander's modified rational paradigm. He suggests that the classic comprehensive paradigm must relax its conditions to become more applicable. This small change to the original definition of rationality, the injection of values - may be the common, or centrist, definition of mainstream planning in the 1990's. Barclay Hudson (1978) suggests that this modern comprehensive paradigm is the most commonly used paradigm from the several paradigms that constitute contingency theory. This report's primary research will later refine this suggestion to define the modern comprehensive paradigm as the ideologically dominant as opposed to the pragmatically dominant paradigm.

A descriptive approach similar to contingency but still adhering to rational/ empiricism, is incrementalism (Lindblom

1959). Incrementalism rejects the notion of long term goals. It argues that specific courses of action for smaller, more specific goals are conducive to effective action, and that decision making involves reaching an agreement within a political framework by a means of successive approximations. Lindblom's critique of rational planning focused on the inability of decision makers to truly consider all values because of incomplete information and the political system's continuous adjustment process. Incrementalism, though, comes from the same root (empirical/rational), it uses the same constructs and vocabulary - logic, sequence, goals - altering them just a little.

The advocacy paradigm also attempts to fill one of the gaps of the comprehensive paradigm by focusing on economic and social pluralism. Advocacy empowers the powerless, suggests a plural public interest, public participation and a planner whose role is spokesperson for the powerless group. Paul Davidoff (1965), the founder of advocacy planning, rejects outright the existence of a solitary public interest in which all groups share equally. Unlike comprehensive planning, advocacy planning is explicitly partisan, suggesting that there are no neutral, value-free criteria for evaluating plans, thus rejecting the role of the objective, technical planner. Advocacy is also grounded in the rational/ empirical root because the planner similarly acts as expert in speaking for the powerless, rather than empowering (training or

education).

#### POWER/COERCIVE ROOT

An alternative to the paradigms under the rational/empirical root are the Marxist, Radical, and Progressive paradigms and theories. These constructs can be traced back to the power/coercive root.

[The power/coercive root] is based on the application of power in some form, political or otherwise. The influence process involved is basically that of compliance of those with less power to the plans, directions, and leadership of those with greater power. (Bennis, Benne, and Chin 1969).

The Marxist paradigm describes the conflicts of planning in a democracy under capitalism using an economic perspective based on class schisms (Fainstein and Fainstein 1982). It promotes central control of decision making, and citizen participation to encourage discourse.

Sub-categories of the Marxist paradigm are the Radical and Progressive theories. The Radical theory suggests a revolutionary mass movement process against the existing powers, but it offers no formative agenda (Kravitz 1968). The Progressive theory promotes an awareness of economic inequality and mass participation, where all conflicts are class based (Clavel 1969). It suggests changing the existing government structure, public ownership of land, and wealth redistribution.

John Friedmann (1987) suggests that the planning profession is experiencing a crisis. There are three reasons for this crisis: confusion concerning the current definition of valid knowledge; historic events happen too quickly, leaving the forces which help to adjust and harness social purpose in the dust; and historic methods of problem solving do not work. It is Friedmann's critique of planning that opens a window of opportunity for theories like contingency, and Friedmann's own solution, social transformation.

Friedmann's response is typical of a theorist embracing the power/coercive root. He suggests recentering political power in society through the planning profession. The planner should take on the role of radical. Friedmann's social transformation theory is a subcategory of the Marxist paradigm. This recentering of political power is to occur on different scales: first, the household economy; second, the regional nexus between the work place and home; third, the low-income periphery of the third world; and finally, the global community<sup>5</sup>.

Friedmann suggests that social reform and social mobilization should be used in conjunction with the skills promoted in social learning, such as communication, group processes, analysis, and small groups, to achieve the process of mediation wherein knowledge is equivalent to values, facts,

---

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of social transformation, see John Friedmann (1987) Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action, Princeton:NJ, pp. 53-75.

and experience. Transformative theory views the structural problems of capitalist society in a global context. It offers a critical interpretation of existing reality by emphasizing the problems of the political and economic system. It forecasts problems with remedial solutions, suggests a preferred outcome, and finally suggests a strategy for reaching the preferred outcome by overcoming the resistance of the established powers.

The power/coercive root is particularly relevant to contingency theory in helping to understand the context in which planning takes place. While perhaps more difficult to implement than those paradigms in the rational/empirical root, it is more useful in identifying stakeholders and their relationships to one another.

#### NORMATIVE/RE-EDUCATIVE ROOT

Similar to the two previously discussed roots, the normative/ re-educative root is a reflection of the historical context from which it emerged. The period since approximately 1972 has been called post-modern (Beauregard 1989; Schimak 1991). The indicators of post-modernity are: hypermobile capital, concentrations of advanced services, a growing gap between upper and lower income levels where only extremes exist, decline of central cities, high technology products and processes, customized and smaller scale production complexes (Beauregard 1989). The paradigms of the normative/re-



educative root are, in fact, a modern (rational/ empirical or power/coercive) response to post-modernity. The post-modern condition is quite daunting to a profession (and society) whose initial strength and legitimacy were founded on the basis of the teachings of the Enlightenment and the structure of bureaucracy.

The post-modernist cultural critique is a complex one. It includes a turn to historical allusion and spatial understandings, the abandonment of critical distance for ironic commentary, the embracing of multiple discourses and the rejection of totalizing ones, a skepticism towards master narratives and general social theories, a disinterest in the performativity of knowledge, the rejection of notions of progress and enlightenment, and a tendency towards political acquiescence. (Beauregard 1989).

The Interpersonal paradigm falls within the normative/re-educative grouping. It stresses the need for greater communication, examines the link between knowledge and action, and addresses how societal action and guidance lead to procedural planning. The key is linkage and the acceptance of planning within a value-laden political process. Planning is defined as interactive, reflective inquiry, and situational. This paradigm attempts to fill the void in the rational/empirical root that hedges on the issue of the practitioners needs; it also offers a proactive orientation that the power/coercive paradigms lack.

The definition of knowledge has changed from denoting only facts in the 1940's and 1950's, to encompassing both facts and values since the 1980's. This change implies that the foundation of the rational/empirical root, to which mainstream planning had previously prescribed, is crumbling. The rational/empirical framework assumes decisions are made based on evidence, criteria, and logic by unbiased experts. According to Innes (1990), this is a narrow view of knowledge that no longer serves as a valid basis for planning.

The model of the linkages between knowledge and policy ... is grounded in an interpretive or phenomenological view of knowledge, rather than in the positivist perspective. It is more contextual, more evolutionary, and more complex than the scientific model. It regards formal, identifiable decisions as only a small part of all that leads to public action. It takes a broader view of what counts as knowledge. (Innes 1990: 3)

Innes's normative views are grounded in the interpersonal paradigm, or more specifically, what she calls the interactive model. This model attempts to examine the symbiotic links between knowledge and public action.

John Forester is another proponent of the interpersonal paradigm. He struggles with the dichotomies that confront the planning profession in Planning in the Face of Power (1989)<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> For an extensive discussion of dichotomies and interpersonal communication practices, see Jurgen Habermas (1979) Communication and the Evolution of Society, Beacon Press: Boston.

These dichotomies, which include democracy and capitalism, politics and rationality, and technical versus political skills, result in dilemmas for the practitioner. If one agrees with Forester's (and Innes') definition of knowledge as both ordinary and expert, as both facts and values, then planning is necessarily a political activity. Forester's hypothesis is that the field of planning is highly political, which, through critical social theory, another subcategory of the interpersonal paradigm, can be understood, and, possibly, turned into an advantage by the post-modern planner.

He analyzes the skills, relationships, character of the profession, and the organizational environment by using interpersonal methodologies. Listening, defined as acknowledging all external and internal influences as communicative processes, in practice leads to a shared understanding. He outlines his critical theory of planning as follows:

First, such an account must do justice to the real, messy settings in which planning takes place. Second, it must embrace the everyday experiences of planners and make sense of their perceptions of the complexities, uncertainties, and ambiguities of daily practice. Third, it must explicitly address normative questions of information distortions, manipulated participation, legitimation, and ideological versus legitimate exercises of power. (Forester 1990: 10)

Forester's answer to the dilemma of dichotomies is that while they exist as extremes in theory, in any progressive

practice they are integrated. The post-modern planner's role is one of mediator, communicator, and educator.

This brief survey of planning paradigms and their roots frames the assessment of contingency theory. Due to contingency planning's situation-driven paradigm, contingency is linked to each of the three roots. It is this fact which makes the contingency model so complex; it accurately reflects the world in which we function and plan. It is for this reason that contingency can not be categorized as a paradigm. As discussed earlier, a paradigm must have roots in a singular philosophical field and must be capable of describing and predicting behavior. While contingency offers a good description of practice oriented behavior, it is only through strategic planning that it structures behavior.

Problems of effectiveness and ethical behavior, however, repeatedly accent the need to develop a practice-oriented planning theory which could suggest actions specific to historical, social, and political- economic circumstances. (Beauregard 1984:258)

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Faludi (1969) has outlined the differences between a "theory of planning" and a "theory in planning." Contingency conforms more closely to the former - a normative "theory of planning". Yet, because contingency is practically inseparable in practice from strategic planning, it is equally a "theory in planning". At which point, the need to examine

strategic planning emerges.

Strategic planning is the programmatic implementation tool of contingency theory. Strategic planning began as a technique of the private sector and the military. There are several differing schools of thought or approaches within strategic planning, but most are generally applicable to both organizations and communities. As a result of critiques of the paradigms that can be traced back to the rational/empirical root, strategic planning was articulated in an attempt to move planning to a more decision oriented focus. As a result of its basis in contingency theory, strategic planning is more limited in scope and time frame, and more sensitive to the decision environment in which planners operate.

A contextually grounded, situationally based approach to strategy promotes an alternative view to the predominant perspective of strategy as technique. In addition, the long standing arguments between incremental and synoptic, and short term versus long term approaches are somewhat displaced by this view. The appropriateness of strategy is conditioned by context and situation, and as the latter changes so should strategic orientations and technique. (Bryson and Einsweiler 1988: 103)

Strategic planning operates on the following assumptions: planning is conducted within an institutional context; municipalities are in competition with one another for a greater tax base and employment opportunities, so competitive

niches should be exploited; and assessment of strengths and weaknesses is critical. This type of planning borrows heavily from the corporate structure, in that it is based on the ideas of the ascendancy of the individual in a capitalist society. Classic comprehensive planning seeks shared, cooperative solutions and tries to smooth out the differences between public and private goals.

Strategic planning is a response to a turbulent and interconnected environment using a specific set of concepts, procedures and tools. It is designed to identify and resolve issues while using existing goals and objectives to translate into work programs and budgets.

An "issue" is a difficulty or problem that has a significant influence on the way an organization functions or its ability to achieve a desired future for which there is no agreed upon response (Roberts 1991). An issue is strategic if it is perceived to involve decisions and actions related to changes in the basic long term goals of an organization and if it involves resource allocation and specific course of action that differ from the status quo.

Postulating that politics is a critical element in the operation of planning, strategic planning does not assume a unitary interest or consensus. It attempts to assess the internal and external environment in which the planning process and the identified issue exist. Unlike long range planning, which assumes that current trends will continue,

strategic planning assumes trends will discontinue and new trends will emerge. Because it is more narrowly focused on specific issues, strategic planning has a more rigorous implementation directive. Long range planning is generally conducted without the review of key decision makers and generally focuses on individual functional elements rather than linkages among them.

The statement that there are three different approaches to the identification of strategic issues (direct, goals, and a vision of success approach) may raise the hackles of some planning theorists and practitioners who believe the start should always be with issues or goals or an idealized scenario for the organization or community. We argue, however, that what will work best probably depends on the situation, and that the wise planner will assess the situation carefully and choose an approach accordingly. (Bryson and Einsweiler 1988:90)

Strategic planning emphasizes action, consideration of broad and diverse stakeholders, attention to external opportunities and threats, internal strengths and weaknesses, and attention to actual or potential competitors. The planner's role is mainly one of a hybrid which mixes political and technical skills.

The strategic planning process is iterative and begins with an initial agreement to identify an issue. It then examines the mandates and values that frame an organization or community. The second part of this inventory stage focuses on the internal and external environment before identifying the

issue. After the issue is identified, strategies for solving the issue in relationship to the organization's or community's future is examined. A preferred strategy is chosen and implementation techniques are outlined. The final step is to monitor and continually update the implementation technique as the environment demands change.

... contingent models for public strategic planning must be developed and tested. These models should specify key situational factors governing use; provide specific advice on how to formulate and implement strategies in different situations; be explicitly political; indicate how to deal with plural, ambiguous, or conflicting goals or objectives; link content and process; indicate how collaboration as well as competition is to be handled; and specify roles for the strategic planner. (Bryson and Einsweiler 1988: 32)

Strategic planning, as an implementation technique of contingency theory, similarly borrows from various roots and paradigms. Strategic planning assumes that long range goals are already in place, or are irrelevant. Realistically, they can only be in place if it is assumed that the rational/empirical root was already employed to offer guidance in the creation of goals. No matter which paradigm is employed to address an issue, the strategic planning process is inseparable from contingency theory.

#### SUMMARY

Upon review of the various paradigms and theories that emerge from the three fundamental roots, contingency seems to



draw from each. The context and attributes of the specific issue are major determinants of planning behavior. The planning process itself must be viewed as the key to planning behavior, and must change to suit different situations. The existing literature on contingency theory does not suggest if and how a planner's ethical foundation can support such flexibility. The three roots, used independently and in conjunction with one another, depending on the issue, constitute the strength of contingency planning.

Not only do case studies show that practitioners utilize methods from the three roots to build a process as it suits them, but that differing situations are well addressed using that approach<sup>7</sup>. Contextual conditions and desired planning outcomes determine the appropriate choices of planning phases and tactics. Planning phases and tactics, as implemented through strategic planning, then determine actual planning outcomes.

This report's primary research must be directed address two queries. First, what is the individual practitioner's ideological framework that guides decision making? And second, what are the factors that have led the practitioner to make this ideological choice? The following chapter discusses the methodology and results of this research.

---

<sup>7</sup> Case studies that test for contingency theory include a study of what planners "do" in the United states by Hoch (1991), education reform in developing countries by Rondinelli, Middleton, and Verspoor (1989), and Meyer and Belobaba's (1982) study on contingency planning and transportation dilemmas.

**CHAPTER THREE**



**QUESTIONNAIRE  
METHODOLOGY & RESULTS**

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the methods that have been used to design and analyze the questionnaire. The concept behind the questionnaire was to determine which theory or paradigm, if any, planners in Rhode Island utilized in making decisions that resulted in planning implementation, and, if so, examine how that process is structured. Follow-up interviews were used to either complete a questionnaire, if it was incomplete, or to discuss them with planners who provided unique or ambiguous responses.

This chapter presents the following: the design methodology of the questionnaire; the results of the questionnaire; the outcome of the follow-up interviews. The implications of the questionnaire will be considered in Chapter Four.

## METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was designed to obtain primary data that would test the validity of the hypothesis. The literature review suggested that contingency would be the theory of choice among practitioners because it offered the most flexibility in decision making. First a sampling frame for the questionnaire and interviews was created. The purpose of this was to obtain information from a manageable number of practicing planners who share a common characteristic, i.e. they have chosen to become members of the Rhode Island -

American Planning Association (APA). A list of practicing APA members in Rhode Island was obtained with the assistance of Kevin Flynn, Director of Planning in Cranston and Chair of the Rhode Island APA Chapter. From the list of 163 members, those with incomplete addresses, current planning students, and professors at CPAD, were eliminated from the list.

A questionnaire was drafted and mailed to the remaining 150 Rhode Island APA members. A copy of the questionnaire is printed on the following pages; a discussion of the questions, and their rationales follows.

Please send back to:

Katia Balassiano                      OR  
216 Warwick Neck Ave.  
Warwick RI 02889

Katia Balassiano  
Graduate Curriculum in  
Community Planning and  
Area Development  
University of RI  
Kingston, RI 02881-0815

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Address \_\_\_\_\_
3. Education  
    No college \_\_\_\_\_ BA only \_\_\_\_\_  
    Masters in City Planning \_\_\_\_\_ PhD \_\_\_\_\_  
    Other masters \_\_\_\_\_ Presently a student \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please check status of present employer:  
    Federal \_\_\_\_\_ Private \_\_\_\_\_  
    Non-profit \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
    Local \_\_\_\_\_
6. Job Title \_\_\_\_\_
7. Years working in planning \_\_\_\_\_
8. Please circle how you would best define your role as a planner? (circle and prioritize)  
    a. technician    b. advocate    c. mediator    d. educator  
    e. politician    f. communicator    g. decision-maker  
    h. other \_\_\_\_\_
9. Please indicate (by circling below) the typical time span in which more than 75% of decisions are required to be made:  
    (1 day) . . . . (1 week) . . . . (1 month) . . . . (1 year)
10. What methods do you use to get public opinion, if any?
- 11a. Is there a specific set of procedures you attempt to follow before reaching a decision, please describe.

please see other side

11b. Please circle how you would describe this procedure:

- a. situational - depending on the varying issue's needs
- b. highly regular - same criteria applied to every issue
- c. ideally regular - beginning with certain criteria then offering leeway for the specific needs of the issue

12. Please circle the most common types of skills used on the job, and then prioritize them (1=high priority, 10=low).

- a.advisory      b.interpersonal (informal)      f.research
- c.reading/writing      d.political      e.administrative (formal)

13a. How would you characterize the ideal planning process?

13b. How would you characterize the actual process used in daily planning?

13c. How does your ideal process differ with the actual process?

14. Please circle and prioritize from the following wish list items that would make work more effective and enjoyable (1=high priority, 10=low priority):

- a.improved personal skills      b.more professional staff
- c.political support      d.community involvement      e.more time
- f.increased budget      g.other \_\_\_\_\_

14. May I contact you for a follow up interview? \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_, best time to reach you \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or additional comments, please feel free to call me at (401) 739-7425.      Thank you.

The questionnaire was designed to include both quantitative and qualitative questions in an open and closed question format. The first few questions were designed to obtain demographic data. Beginning with question eight, the respondent was asked to describe the type of planning he/she is involved with and the process by which that planning is conducted. The second page began with the key question, eleven b, which moves to the core of contingency theory. This question concerning the planning process would be asked again later, but in a different format, in question thirteen. This question also directly confronted the ideal versus actual planning process. Question fourteen ended the survey with a close ended question regarding a list of items that would make the planner's job easier - a place to allow the planner to comment about the obstacles to conducting effective planning.

From the way some questions were answered, it became obvious that parts of the questionnaire were not as clear or simple to the respondents. Due to some of the problems with the returned answers, the way the results were tabulated needed refinement. Given the time restraints, the questionnaire was not "piloted", or sent to a small sample of practitioners, to test the design effectiveness. If this had been done, the problems could have been remedied prior to the larger mailing.

Questions eight, twelve, and fourteen asked the respondents to answer the question in two stages - choose

answers and then rank them. Less than a third of the respondents completed both parts of this type of question format. Also, upon consideration of the categories listed, the categories were either not inclusive of the entire range of actual options, or they were subject to interpretation and overlap. For example, question eight, an "educator" may be regarded as both a "communicator" and "mediator"; and actually all categories involve identification with the "decision-maker" category. Similarly, in question twelve, there may really be little difference between the skills of "research" and "reading/ writing".

The problem was remedied by ignoring the request to rank categories and rather than examine the specific set of categories chosen, the number circled were tallied to determine if a practitioner categorized him/herself as a hybrid or generalist with many roles and many skills, or a more focused type of planner with a more limited need for skills.

To assess whether there is a relationship between time allotted for decision-making (question nine) and the decision process (question eleven-b), the respondents who chose "one day" or "one week" were grouped in one category and the others, "one month" and "one year", in a second category. This was also necessary because some respondents indicated a middle point, or circled a range of responses instead of just one.



The letter was composed to accompany the questionnaire, in which the RI - APA members were asked to mail back the survey (Appendix B). Though a return address was designated on the questionnaire, self addressed stamped envelopes were not included.

## FINDINGS

From the total of one-hundred and fifty questionnaires mailed on October 31, 1991, thirty were returned completed. The response rate was therefore twenty percent.

Question three asked about the education level and everyone responded. None of the respondents are currently students, and all have post secondary school degrees. Twenty-one have a masters degree, overwhelmingly a Masters of Community Planning. Five have a Bachelors degree, and three have received a Ph.D.

Question four asked about the respondents' ages. Three chose not to respond to this question. The range was between twenty-five and eighty-nine years. The mean was forty years, the median thirty-eight years.

Question five asked about the current type of employment. None work at the federal level. One worked part time for a non-profit organization, and part time as a private consultant. Of the remaining respondents, two worked for non-profits, fifteen for local municipalities, six for private firms, and four for the state.

Question six asked for the titles of the positions. For the sake of comparison, the responses are organized into five categories: eight fell into the category of Town or City Planner; seven into the category of Planning Director; six into the category of Senior Planner; five into the category of planning specialist, e.g. environmental, economic development; and two in the category of private consultant.

Question seven asked for the number of years in the planning profession. The responses ranged from one to thirty-five. The mean was twelve years, the median was eight years.

Question eight asked about the planner's role, the problems with the structure of this question were discussed earlier. Three did not respond, five chose only one role, and all the rest indicated more than one role. Of the twenty-six who responded to the question, twenty-two did not circle the "politician" role, the implications of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Question nine, also was adjusted for better tabulation purposes, it asked about the available time allocated for decision making. Approximately half said they made decisions in the short range (one day to one week); the other half of respondents fell into the longer range (one month to one year).

Question ten asked about the various ways of getting public opinion. The responses ranged from public hearings to newspapers. Generally, all respondents used some source to

obtain public opinion - some mandatory, some optional. This information, upon review, is not relevant to this study because there is little correlation between the means of gathering public opinion and contingency theory. Most practitioners are bound by legislative mandates to conduct a minimal amount of public involvement.

Question eleven-a was open ended and concerned the decision making process. Fourteen respondents described the process in terms of the modern comprehensive paradigm. Those respondents generally listed the process in a sequential format: identify goals, conduct research, list alternatives, choose best alternatives, put together a plan, and implement. Some substituted "identify the problem" for "identify the goals", this hinted at specific project planning or strategic planning, rather than comprehensive planning. Others omitted the first part, goals identification, entirely and went straight to research. Others reshuffled the process. Four wrote that planners do not make decisions. Respondent sixteen wrote,

We as planners do not make decisions! [Just] supply research findings and recommendations to [the] Council.

Four others responded that there is no identifiable process, or as respondent nineteen wrote,

...How [a] decision is made is based upon [the] item/ event under examination.

The remaining respondents either did not answer that question.

Question eleven-b asked the practitioners to respond to a similar question, but in a shorter version. Fifteen described the planning process as situation-dependent; ten described it as ideally regular; and one answered that it was highly regular.

Question twelve was close ended and asked about the types of skills the practitioners used at work. From the thirty respondents, only four answered that they use only one or two types of skills. Those four practitioners were in the position of either Planning Director or Planning Specialist. All the rest indicated that they employed three or more skills to do their work.

Question thirteen involved three parts, a, b, and c. This set of questions probably demanded the most time and thought compared to the rest of the survey. The respondents were asked to describe and compare their ideal and actual planning process. In all cases, the two descriptions were different. Three wrote that there is no ideal process,

The ideal process is a figment of some theorist's mind - it doesn't exist.

Thirteen wrote that the ideal process resembles the comprehensive paradigm and that the actual process is marred by a lack of resources including staff, money and time, and that politics in the form of interest groups, personal feelings, and values equally complicate the actual process. Six answered similarly, but blamed the difference purely on political pressures.

#### FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

As mentioned previously, only one respondent described the planning process as "highly regular". Since this qualified as a unique response, an interview was conducted with that respondent to explore his answer. Respondent thirty admitted that it was quite difficult for him to answer that question. His view of community planning is based on the rational/empirical root; he wants to maintain an objective stance that leads to rational ends. He has recently led his community into the completion of a comprehensive plan. The modern comprehensive paradigm is centrist for him, yet he acknowledges that it does not fit all of his needs.

While he is comfortable as a planning technician, his job in the Planning Department demands other roles as well. He stressed the need for flexibility. According to Respondent thirty,

Every issue needs to be handled individually so as to direct it down a successful route.

He noted that the dynamics of the job were success oriented. As a graduate of a Master's program in Community Planning, he said that there is a difference between studying the planning process and the actual implementation of plans. Reaching the accomplishment stage involves acknowledging political and financial responsibilities. As Hudson (1979) states:

Having a planner with the ability to mix approaches is the only way to assure that they can respond with sensitivity to the diversity of problems and settings confronted, and to the complexity of every situation.

Hudson goes on to explain that the planning styles that have been suggested since the classic comprehensive paradigm are not meant to replace the classic paradigm, but rather to broaden the perspective on issues and offer another set of voices for articulating the public interest. The contingency paradigm suggests moving away from the "one best way" approach to planning and suggests that the appropriate range of choices regarding organizational structure and process is contingent on any number of relevant factors (Hudson 1979).

Another planner whose completed questionnaire demanded further explanation was Respondent twenty-five. Similar to Respondent thirty, his paradigm came from the rational/empirical root, more specifically, Lindblom's incrementalism,

[The actual planning process is] slow, incremental and rarely does the final outcome match the original idea or concept.

This practitioner acknowledged that he has become quite cynical of the environment in which planning takes place. After being in the profession for eighteen years, he felt that there is no such thing as an ideal planning process, but if there were such a thing, he would be willing to try it.

His undergraduate education in planning has since been supplemented by experience in the field of private and public planning. Apparently he enjoyed private planning practice more than his current work for the State,

... while special interest groups usually have good intentions, you end up spending too much time with them, trying to meet their needs, and then you end up spending less time with the other (unrepresented) constituents.

Respondent thirty complained that the pressures of politics skewed his planning work and produced unfair reports with which he was not pleased. When asked if he ever considered returning to school to earn a Master's degree, he said that the experience he was getting on the job was more than he could probably ever learn in a classroom setting.

## SUMMARY

The majority of questionnaires returned were entirely completed and contained thoughtful answers. A response rate of twenty percent is sufficient to draw some valid deductions and conduct analysis of the findings. The ones that were not completed had written their telephone numbers on the questionnaire. These respondents were generally easy to reach by telephone and were willing to spend some time having the questions they originally failed to answer, explained, and then offered responses.

The primary data collected from the questionnaire makes it possible to compare and categorize responses from a sample of planning practitioners in Rhode Island. The key indicators that help define a planner's paradigm are age, education, the number of years spent in the planning profession, and the practitioner's current position title. These indicators will be analyzed in terms of how the practitioners responded to the series of questions that concerned the actual versus ideal planning process. The implications of the questionnaire and trend analysis, is discussed in the following chapter.



**CHAPTER FOUR**



**ANALYSIS**

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

The previous chapter described the questionnaire results. The original purpose of the questionnaire was to examine whether the planning that practitioners in Rhode Island practice may be best described by contingency theory. This chapter will offer an analysis of the implications of the questionnaire responses and then place the findings within an overview of trends in the planning profession.

In general, younger practitioners, in their middle to early thirties, have worked fewer years in planning. Seventy-five percent of those who described planning as situational had worked in planning fewer than eight years. But this group may also be noted for their participation in higher education: all having earned a Master's degree in Community Planning.

The other group of respondents who share common characteristics are older than 35. They have spent a longer time working in the profession and have a more varied educational profile. An equal number in this category either do not have a Masters degree or have received their Ph.D. This group tends to describe the planning process as ideally regular.

Although the difference between describing planning as "situational" and "ideally regular" (see question eleven-b) is a fine one, the implications of the differences can be examined in terms of the practitioners' ages, i.e. the

independent variable<sup>8</sup>. It appears that the linkage between planning education and the world context (including economics, politics, and historic events) have had a great influence on how planners plan. Those who are older were educated during a time in which the validity of the rational/empirical root was hardly questioned. Perhaps as they spent more time in planning, they began to realize that planning is not a linear process that can objectively solve complicated problems through the means of scientific deduction.

And yet, in the 1990's, the older planners cling to the notion that planning is ideally a regular process. Similarly, those who worked in planning more than eight years tended to identify with a singular, as opposed to a multifaceted, planning role.

#### TRENDS IN PLANNING

Planning theorists, on the fringe of the field, in the 1990's are examining the link between knowledge and action, redefining what constitutes knowledge, and generally re-examining the profession as a whole. They are evaluating how the field has changed from its origins in land use. These trends have resulted in the movement of the focus of planning to the planning process. The client of the planning process has become the planner rather than the citizens or city for

---

<sup>8</sup> A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Urban Studies, in 1976, similarly found the independent variable to be age.

whom the planner works. (Innes 1990; Forester 1989; Friedmann 1987; Schoen 1982).

This reevaluation of planning and the planning process may prove to be detrimental to the profession, due to the strong possibility of disenfranchisement of the object of the planning process, i.e. the citizens or city. As academia searches to recenter the profession, the focus of planning is on the process, rather than on the object of planning.

The renewed interest in understanding the link between knowledge and action originated from a perceived lack of communication between academicians and practitioners. Where once theory was driven by academic thought, the actions of practitioners are now being transcribed to theory (Glasmeier and Kahn 1989: 7). Currently, the trend is toward understanding what the practitioner does on a day-to-day basis, and developing a theory from that information. Contingency is one such theory.

The definition of knowledge is expanding. Planning has always been an interdisciplinary field, but trends show that this is becoming increasingly so. Due to the general ascendance of the value based social sciences, the definition of knowledge now includes qualitative data elicited by interpersonal communicative skills.

Though the goal of this type of research is to strengthen the bond between knowledge and action, it may, at the same time, widen the gap between the two. As the theorist looks to

the practitioner for a validation of planning theory, the theorist learns that the practitioner is still concerned with concepts from the 1940's - physical planning, land use, and now including environmental aspects and urban design. The classic comprehensive paradigm still offers the planner a protective shield, behind which the planner is the "objective technician". At public hearings or meetings with officials "logical", "objective" and "rational" are still words used to convey a proposal's quality at public hearings or meetings with officials.

As the intellectualization of planning practice, planning theory attempts to interpret the world and suggest ways of changing it. But the two objectives - theory and practice - have not always been equally pursued. More often than not, planning theorists have opted to establish a theoretical object, the planning process, distinct from the built environment that serves as the object for most planning practitioners. As a result, the subsequent theory has been of little utility to those who labor in the field of action rather than in the realm of contemplation. (Beauregard 1984:255)

Beauregard's eloquent critique is generally on target, yet it is perhaps too encompassing. If one divides the object of planning into the categories of physical and social, then it is the category of social planning that is experiencing greater problems. Physical planning, and in particular, environmental planning and urban design, are still guided by the rational/empirical root.

The gap between theorists and practitioners continues to widen. Levy (1992) cites both radical and social planning as having caused the greatest rifts in the relationship between theory and practice. Levy identifies these two theories and suggests that they do not have agendas that can be practically applied. On the other hand, planning will never change if innovative ideas are judged on their present inapplicability.

The practitioner is struggling with concepts such as the notions which Forester (1989) and Baum (1990) articulated - planning as embodied in politics and organizational structure. But as the profession continues to push for self-legitimation, it is faced with many more avenues of applicability, such as health and education planning, than in the period from the 1940's to the 1970's. The scope of planning is being defined more broadly. It is more versatile and, as a result more confusing. If whatever practitioners do on the job conforms to some theory that theoreticians design to legitimize the planning process, then many planning styles could be acceptable.

According to Levy (1992), there are several trends in planning which suggest that not only is the profession actively searching for a better and more widely agreed upon paradigm, but that contingency theory offers elements of that possible paradigm.

But as many who are concerned about planning have noted there is an overarching problem. The field does not seem to have any guiding principle or central paradigm. The comprehensive plan lost its dominance several decades ago and nothing has come along to replace it. Planners often discuss planning as a process, but much less frequently discuss where this process is to lead. (Levy 1992: 81)

The normative range of planning topics has expanded in response to citizen demand, but the profession does not yet have the expertise to address this demand. Though planning has acknowledged the political element as critical, substantively, planning now tends to follow the election cycle and plans are written mainly for the short term. Citizen involvement has increased, but citizen groups tend to form in opposition to topics, rather than in favor of them. As Respondent twenty-one wrote,

[The ideal process differs from the actual process in that] there is very little positive citizen involvement.

Planners, then, are often on the defensive, and may cynically see citizens and participatory legislation as barriers to action.

Plans reflect one or a few interests and are developed in reaction to historical momentum, politics, and de facto variances in frequently cacophonous debates among promoters, NIMBY's, demagogues, and bureaucrats. (Respondent fourteen)

The general lack of funding encourages planners to focus on projects that tend to either generate money for a municipality or generate money for the planning office. Economic development projects bring in the most funding support. This pursuit of funding support encourages short term planning. The virtues of flexibility, improvisation, and quick response are more greatly valued than thorough, long range, comprehensive planning.

#### SUMMARY

The current field of planning is in a complex and confused state. Concerns regarding its identity and ethical standards abound.

Is the profession perhaps searching for one best theory? The profession found its stability and legitimacy in the 1940's when the paradigm of classic comprehensiveness was adopted. Planners shared a common bond of the assumptions which grounded this paradigm. This shared world view may rest at the heart of true professional legitimization. It may encourage the profession to again settle on one single paradigm, similar to that proposed in Galloway and Mahayni's model (1977). The profession, in its struggle to redefine its boundaries and adapt to contemporary needs, is challenged by a growing lack of faith in the rational/empirical root and its ability to predict and plan for the long term. Could not the profession find an alternative agreed upon paradigm which



would bind the community of planners and offer legitimation once again?

Sue Hendler (1991) responds to this challenge with a renewed call for planning ethics, rather than a single paradigm, to serve as the bond to reunite theorists and practitioners. She uses the professions of law and medicine as examples to remind us that, similar to planning, they are widely diverse fields, yet in addition to adhering to a single paradigm, they use a common set of ethics to unite and give legitimacy to the profession. Granted, medicine and law have strict procedures and processes (some mandated by the courts and legislature) which guide their actions. Hendler's work is just one example of a theoretician's attempt at seeking solutions to the profession's internal gaps.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**



## **CONCLUSIONS**

## SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The literature review and the analysis of Rhode Island practitioners' thoughts on planning reveal that planners are committed to the ideal of the comprehensive paradigm which emphasizes rational planning and neutral policy roles for practitioners. Yet, in its behavior the contingency theory may best characterize the day-to-day bureaucracy and situational compromises in which planners make decisions. Despite theoretical ideals of comprehensiveness, goal setting, and long range rationality, planners in Rhode Island make decisions in a contingent manner. The hypothesis of this study has proved to be valid.

Though contingency planning as a paradigm has yet to be fully explored and tested, it serves as a good description of how planners make decisions in Rhode Island, especially when the modern comprehensive paradigm fails. Nonetheless, practitioners appear to favor the empirical/rational root as a device to legitimize the role of professional.

Contingency is both a normative theory in planning and a behavioral theory of planning<sup>9</sup>. This definition rests on two reasons: first, contingency is comprised of theories and paradigms in the three fundamental roots; and second, because contingency theory is implemented through strategic planning.

---

<sup>9</sup> This is the distinction Andreas Faludi (1973) has in mind when he discusses theories of planning, i.e. the process, as opposed to theories in planning, i.e., objects to which the process is applied.

The modern comprehensive paradigm is the dominant paradigm to which most practitioners, who plan on a contingency basis, are ideologically committed. This is in part because the rational/empirical root is still dominant in other professions, such as economics, medicine, and law. The language of empiricism is one that is shared and understood by many professional groups. The modern comprehensive paradigm's theoretical language is therefore accessible to all groups, from citizens to corporations to politicians. The factor that makes the modern comprehensive paradigm most attractive to planners is that the paradigm is promoted as theoretically omniscient: it can predict the future and create goals that have the strength to overcome barriers to guide future action. Modern comprehensiveness is therefore the ideal, but as the survey findings show, not the reality of day-to-day planning practice.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE PLANNING PROFESSION

Though the modern comprehensive paradigm is dominant in the planning profession and in contingency theory, as discussed earlier, the paradigm faces challenges. Many authors suggest that there is currently no singular paradigm to offer a unified approach to practice (Schimak 1991; Hoch 1991; Ferraro 1991). Planners remain free to select the role most compatible with their personal background or training. It depends on individual planners, in a specific context, to

make the decisions that lead to effective solutions for long and short term changes. Planners in Rhode Island plan on a contingency basis and the planning decisions they implement are best characterized by contingency theory.

While this may satisfy an individual planner's need to "get the job done", and may even benefit the municipality in which he or she works, this places a great deal of trust in the individual planner's ethics. Though contingency is descriptive of the current process, this does not imply that it should be the paradigm of the future. Widespread application of contingency theory maybe detrimental to the planning profession. There is continued fragmentation and theoretical diversity within the field. Since planning is based in applied field work that affects everything from a community's economy to a citizen's well being, some degree of uniformity is critical for the profession's advancement. In this, diversity need not be a drawback; uniformity may take the form of careful analysis and an open planning process. Contingency theory may be a vehicle toward a better understanding of the link between theory and practice, but may not be the final product of this exploration.

Rather than a single model of planning and community intervention with a precise set of roles and attitudes, planning has increasingly been defined in multi-model terms (Friedmann and Hudson 1974; Hudson 1979; Rothman 1974). Though it may be easier to choose a singular paradigm with

definite boundaries and methods, no one paradigm is currently available to guide the user through every decision. The planner must transcend the barrier of exclusivity use of traditional tools and techniques of analysis and adapt to the larger social processes in which planning takes place.



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

ROOT: RATIONAL/EMPIRICAL

PARADIGM	AUTHORS	TIME PERIOD	CLIENT OF PROCESS	PLANNER'S ROLE	TYPE OF GOALS	IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES	CONTEXT	ASSUMPTIONS
CLASSIC COMPREHENSIVE	HAAR, BLACK	1940-1950	BUSINESS, PROPERTY OWNER	TECHNICIAN "MINI-MAX"	LAND-USE, PHYSICAL	CLASSIFICATION HIERARCHY OBJECTIVITY	PROFESSION SEARCHING FOR LEGITIMACY	ONE PUBLIC INTEREST, LIMITED DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE
MODERN COMPREHENSIVE	MEYERSON, BANFIELD, GANS	1980-CURRENT	ALL INTEREST GROUPS	TECHNICIAN/HYBRID	INTERRELATIONSHIP OF FUNCTIONAL AREAS	CLASSIC COMP & NORMATIVE/RE-EDUCATIVE METHODS	UPDATE CLASSIC COMP W/ BROADER VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE	NO SINGLE PUBLIC INTEREST
INCREMENTAL	LINDBLOM	1955-1960	GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY	SATISFICER	DAY TO DAY, NO LONG RANGE PLANS	TRADE-OFFS, POLICY ORIENTED	RESPONSE TO INEFFECTIVE CLASSIC COMP	BOUNDED RATIONALITY, LIMITED RESOURCES
ADVOCACY	DAVIDOFF, REINER, KRUMHOLZ	1960'S	LOW INCOME PEOPLE	SPOKESPERSON	EMPOWERMENT	FORM COALITIONS, INCREASE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	FAILURE OF URBAN RENEWAL, CIVIL RIGHTS	MORE THAN ONE PUBLIC INTEREST, PLANNER STILL EXPERT
CONTINGENCY	BRYSON, HOWE, HUDSON, DELBEQC	1980-CURRENT	DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION	HYBRID	ACCOMPLISH TASK, CLIENT DEPENDENT	STRATEGIC PLANNING	DESCRIPTIVE OF PLANNING PRACTICE	PLANNING IS TOO COMPLEX TO BE DEFINED BY ONE PARADIGM



# APPENDIX A (continued)

ROOT: POWER/COERCIVE

PARADIGM	AUTHORS	TIME PERIOD	CLIENT OF PROCESS	PLANNER'S ROLE	TYPE OF GOALS	IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES	CONTEXT	ASSUMPTIONS
MARXIST	FAINSTEIN & FAINSTEIN, BEAUREGARD	1979	LOW INCOME AND WORKING CLASS	POLITICAL ACTIVIST	CONTROL OF DECISION MAKING BY THE MASSES	CREATE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS	FEAR OF RULING CLASS MAINTAINING POWER	INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MONEY & POWER; CLASS ORIENTED
RADICAL	GRABOW, HESKINS	1965-1975	POWERLESS	POLITICAL ACTIVIST	REMOVE FROM OFFICE THOSE IN POWER	PROTEST, VIOLENCE	CLASSIC COMP IS ELITIST	ADVOCACY PLANNING HAS FAILED
PROGRESSIVE	CLAVEL	1970-1980	POOR URBAN RESIDENT	POLITICAL ACTIVIST	RESTRUCTURE GOVERNMENT	COMMUNITY WIDE COALITIONS, REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH	POWERLESS-NESS OF URBAN POOR, CITIES ARE FAILING	ALTER GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE THROUGH THE PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF LAND
CONTINGENCY	BRYSON, HOWE, HUDSON, DELBEQC	1980-CURRENT	DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION	HYBRID	ACCOMPLISH TASK, CLIENT DEPENDENT	STRATEGIC PLANNING	DESCRIPTIVE OF PLANNING PRACTICE	PLANNING IS TOO COMPLEX TO BE DEFINED BY ONE PARADIGM

## APPENDIX A (continued)

ROOT: NORMATIVE/RE-EDUCATIVE

PARADIGM	AUTHORS	TIME PERIOD	CLIENT OF PROCESS	PLANNER'S ROLE	TYPE OF GOALS	IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES	CONTEXT	ASSUMPTIONS
INTERPERSONAL	HABERMAS, DEWEY, INNES SCHOEN	1985-CURRENT	THE PLANNER & PLANNING PROCESS	SOCIAL CHANGE AGENT	INCREASED UNDERSTANDING	REFLECTION, INCREASED COMMUNICATION	RESPONSE TO GAP BETWEEN THEORY & PRACTICE	BROADER INVOLVEMENT IN AGENDA SETTING
CRITICAL THEORY	FORESTER, HUDSON	1985	THE PLANNER & PLANNING PROCESS	FACILITATOR OF DISCUSSION	OBTAIN VALID INFORMATION THROUGH BROAD DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE	LISTENING, INCREASED COMMUNICATION	EXTENSION OF THE INTERPERSONAL PARADIGM	PLANNING TAKES PLACE IN A POLITICAL SETTING
CONTINGENCY	BRYSON, HOWE, HUDSON, DELBEQC	1980	DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION	HYBRID	ACCOMPLISH TASK, CLIENT DEPENDENT	STRATEGIC PLANNING	DESCRIPTIVE OF PLANNING PRACTICE	PLANNING IS TOO COMPLEX TO BE DEFINED BY ONE PARADIGM

NOTE: The matrices in Appendix A were based on the readings and materials for CPL 523, Planning Theory taught by Dr. Marcia Marker Feld. The paradigms and theories were categorized into fundamental roots by Marty Davey and Katia Balassiano in the Fall of 1991. This Appendix is a summary of the narrative in Chapter Two. It is by no means a complete survey of all planning theories or paradigms. The intention of this Appendix is to offer the reader a matrix by which to compare the various paradigms and theories.

## APPENDIX B

October 31, 1991  
216 Warwick Neck Avenue  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02889  
(401) 739-7425

Dear Member of the American Planning Association:

I am a second year Master's student in the Community Planning and Area Development program at the University of Rhode Island and am presently working on my Master's Thesis Project. My thesis advisor is Dr. Marcia Marker Feld. I am currently researching the field of planning theory, which specifically involves the question, "How do planners in Rhode Island make decisions."

My preliminary literature review has revealed a gap between the ideal planning process and how practitioners function in the field. The questionnaire that I have sent you, and all other APA members in Rhode Island, is of primary importance to my study. Rhode Island APA President Kevin Flynn reviewed my thesis abstract and offered his assistance by supplying me with the RI-APA membership list. I sincerely hope that you will find the time to assist me in my research by completing the questionnaire and by sending it back to me.

The second phase of my study will involve follow up interviews. At the end of the questionnaire I ask whether I may call you to schedule such an interview, or at that time, just conduct one over the phone. I appreciate all the time and information you can give me.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the compiled answers, please note that on the questionnaire. In the final product I will not use your names or the names of the communities in which you work, so please feel free to answer candidly.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Katia Balassiano

## APPENDIX C

### Partial Display of Survey Results

#	EDUC Q3	AGE Q4	EMPLOYER Q5	POSITION TITLE Q6	TITLE CODE	YR Q7	ROLE Q8	TIME Q9	DESCRIBE Q11B	SKILLS Q12
1	c	89	retired	Planning Director	b	31	1	a	c	2
2	b	35	c	Principal Planner	c	7	5	b	a	6
3	b	38	c	Town Planner	a	14	3	a	c	5
4	b	46	d	Planning Director	b	14	1	a	c	6
5	b	32	d	Sr. Project Mngr	c	6	2	a	a	6
6	e	36	e	Coord. of Research	c	8	1	a	c	6
7	b	62	c	Town Planner	a	5	3	b	c	5
8	b	49	d	Consultant	e	15	2	a	c	4
9	d	50	d	Vice President	b	17	4	b	c	5
10	b	32	e	Program Coordinator	d	5	2	b	c	4
11	b	29	c	Town Planner	a	5	3	a	a	5
12	d	84	b	Consultant	e	18	1	a	a	3
13	b	25	c	Town Planner	a	2	7	b	a	5
14	c	49	d	Landscape Arch.	d	26	3	b	c	2
15	b,c	35	c	Econ. Dev. Planner	d	4	3	b	a	6
16	d	41	d	Director of Planning	b	5	2	b	c	5
17	b	60	e	Assoc.Dir.of Adminis	b	35	1	a	c	1
18	d	50	b,d	Consultant	e	8	5	a	a	6
19	b	29	c	Town Planner	a	5	2	a	a	5
20	b	46	d	Vice President	b	20	4	a	c	7
21	b	30	c	Comm.Dev.Planner	d	5	3	b	a	1
22	d	42	c	Town Planner	a	20	5	a	a	5
23	b	27	b	Environ.Planner	d	1	3	a	a	5
24	b	50	c	Principal Planner	c	27	1	b	a	6
25	d	40	e	Supervising Planner	b	18	5	b	c	6
26	b,c	28	c	Assistant Planner	a	2	6	b	a	5
27	b	30	c	Director of Planning	b	5	4	b	a	5
28	b	27	c	Town Planner	a	17	1	a	c	5
29	c	42	c	Senior Planner	c	2	8	b	a	5
30	b	38	c	Dir.of Policy&Planni	b	14	7	a	c	5

[REDACTED]

## RESOURCES

## RESOURCES

Alexander, Ernest R. 1980. From idea to action: Notes for a contingency theory of the policy implementation process. Administration and Society. v.16: 403-426.

Alexander, Ernest R. 1984. After rationality, what? A review of response to paradigm breakdown. JAPA v.50: 62-73.

Beatley, T. and Goldstein, H. 1983. Normative theory and procedural rationality. Paper presented at the 25th Annual Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, October 21-23, San Francisco, Ca.

Beauregard, Robert A. 1984. Making planning theory: A retrospection. Urban Geography. v.5, 3: 255-261.

Beauregard, Robert A. 1989. Between modernity and post-modernity: The ambiguous position of U.S. planning. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. v.7: 381-395.

Bennis, Warren, Kenneth Benne, and Robert Chin. 1961. The Planning of Change. Holt, Rinehart and Winston: NY.

Bryson, John M. 1978. A Contingent Approach to Program Planning. PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Bryson, John M. and Robert C. Einsweiler. 1988. Strategic Planning: Threats and opportunities for Planners. Planners Press, APA: Chicago, Illinois and Washington DC.

Bryson, John M. and Robert C. Einsweiler (eds.) 1981. Strategic Planning: Threats and Opportunities for Planners. Planners Press, APA: Chicago and Washington, DC.

Bryson, John M. 1979. Some implications of contingency approaches to planning for planning theory, methods, practices, and education. Paper presented at the Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, 13-14 October. Baltimore, Md.

Bryson, John M., Philip Bromiley, and Yoon Soo Jung. 1981. Influences of context and process on project planning success. JPER. v.9,3: 183-195.

Bryson, John M. and Delbecq, Andre L. 1979. A contingent approach to strategy and tactics in project planning. JAPA v.45: 167-179.

Christensen, Karen. 1985. Coping with uncertainty in planning. JAPA v.51: 63-73.

Davidoff, Paul. 1965. Advocacy and pluralism in planning. JAPA v.31: 331-338.

Dror, Yehezkel. 1963. The planning process: A facet design. International Review of Administrative Sciences. 29:46-58.

Fainstein, Norman and Susan S. 1982. New debates in urban planning, The impact of marxist theory within the United States. Paris (ed). Critical Readings in Planning Theory. Oxford:Pergamon. 147-173.

Faludi, Andreas (ed). 1969. A Reader in Planning Theory. Pergamon press.

Feld, Marcia Marker. 1990. CPL 523 Planning Theory, Graduate Course taught at the University of Rhode Island. Fall.

Ferraro, Giovanni. 1991. Irrationality in planning. Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12.

Forester, John. 1985. Practical rationality in plan making. Breheny, S. and B. Hooper (eds). Rationality in Planning. London:Pion Books.

Forester, John. 1989. Planning in the Face of Power. University of California:California.

Forester, John. 1991. Practice stories and the priority of practical judgement. Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12.

Friedmann, John and Barclay Hudson. 1974. Knowledge and action: A guide to planning theory. JAPA v.40: 2-16.

Friedmann, John. 1983. Retracking America: A Theory of Transactive Planning. New York:Anchor Press.

Friedmann, John. 1987. Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action. Princeton: NJ.

Friend, John K. and Allen Hickling. 1987. Planning under pressure: The strategic choice approach. Urban and Regional Planning Series. v.37. Oxford England: Pergamon.

Galloway, Thomas and Mahayni, Riad. 1977. Planning theory in retrospect. JAPA. v.43: 62-71.

Glasmeier, Amy and Terry Kahn. 1989. Planners in the 1980's: Who we are, where we work. JPER v.9,1: 5-17.

Godschalk, D.R.(editor). 1972. Planning in America: Learning from Turbulence Chicago. American Institute of Planners.

Grant, Jill. 1990. Understanding the social context of planning. Environments v.20,3: 10-19.

Haar, Charles. 1955. The master plan - An impermanent constitution. Law and Contemporary Problems. v.20.

Hendler, Sue. 1991. A contractual approach to planning ethics. Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12.

Hoch, Charles. 1991. What do planners do in the United States? Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12, 1991.

Hudson, Barclay. Comparisons of current planning theories: Counterparts and contradictions. JAPA v.45: 387-398.

Innes, Judith. 1990. Knowledge and Public Policy. 2nd edition. Transaction Publishers:NJ. 1-43.

Kartez, Jack D. 1989. Rational arguments and irrational audiences: psychology, planning, and public judgement. JAPA v.55: 445-450.

Kartez, Jack D. 1984. Crisis response planning: Toward a contingent analysis. JAPA v.50: 9-17.

Kravitz, Alan. 1968. Advocacy and beyond. Planning. American Society of Planning Officials. 38-46.

Krieger, Martin H. 1991. Contingency in planning: Statistics, fortune, and history. JPER v.10,2: 157-161.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1970. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Levy, John M. 1992. What has happened to planning? JAPA winter 58.1: 81-84.

Lindblom, Charles. 1959. The science of muddling through. Public Administration Review. v.19: 79-88.

March, James and Simon, Herbert. 1958. Organization. New York:Wiley and Sons.



Meyer, Michael D. and Belobaba, Peter. 1982. Contingency planning for response to urban transportation disruptions. JAPA v.48: 454-465.

MIT's Department of Urban Studies. Planners in transition: A report on a survey of MIT alumni in the department of urban studies. JAPA v.42: 193-202.

Roberts, Peter. 1991. Strategic management: New challenges for planning. Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12.

Rondinelli, Middleton, and Verspoor. 1989. Contingency planning for innovative projects: Designing education reforms in developing countries. JAPA v.55: 45-58.

Rothman, Jack. 1974. Planning and Organizing for Social Change: Action Principles from Social Science Research. Columbia University Press: New York.

Schimak, Gerhard. 1991. Planning and the future. Prepared for the joint ACSP/AESOP conference, Oxford, England July 8-12.

Schoen, Don. 1982. Professional Knowledge and Reflection-in-Action, Pergamon Press.