

FEATURE ARTICLE

Planning as Playmaking

An Integrated Approach to Preparing for the Future

by James B. Young and Margaret J. Baker

With integrated planning, institutions choose the future; without it, the future is chosen for them.

OPENING

All colleges and universities plan.

But it's how they plan—how often, how well, whom they involve (and how), and how integrated their planning is—that makes the difference. There is a myth that higher education planning is either a perfunctory “check-the-box” activity that fosters a culture of suffocating order or a commitment to exhaustively developed “best-laid plans” that unravel (or are ignored) at the critical juncture of implementation. With “planning as playmaking,” neither has to be true.

Consider a basketball metaphor. Crowds cheer for points scored and all teams want to win. Teams employ coaches, invest in player development, and execute intricate strategies to build formidable programs and (hopefully) beat opponents. Everyone knows that more points typically means more wins, but experienced coaches, fans, and players know that a more compelling narrative—one that draws on the careful integration of sound coaching, talent, ongoing player development, awareness of opponent strengths and weaknesses, and shrewd playmaking tactics—is the foundation for scoring points. Only teams that invest in this kind of integrated planning can have long-term, durable success.

Of the many elements that bridge disparate planning activities, the concept of passing grounds planning in durable integration. Skilled passing requires teamwork and leads

to playmaking, and playmaking wins games. Good passers are aware and instinctual. They know the court, read the situation, govern flow, connect dots, apply resources when and where needed, and encourage change. Without a doubt, you need good defense and strong shooters to win games, but it is often the art of passing that sets the tone, sparks activity, fosters distributed leadership, and prepares teams to develop a culture of winning.

Institutions that plan integratively emulate basketball teams that recognize the power of the pass. These institutions draw on rich legacies, honor timeless missions, and stay true to institutional values while simultaneously crafting an inspiring change narrative and a compelling vision that drive institutional choices and actions. With integrated planning, institutions choose the future; without it, the future is chosen for them.

WHAT IS INTEGRATED PLANNING AND WHY IS IT SO HARD TO ACHIEVE?

In higher education, playmaking is integrated planning. At the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), we define integrated planning as a sustainable approach to planning that builds relationships, aligns the institution, and emphasizes preparedness for change. Integrated planning engages all sectors of the academy—academic affairs, student affairs, business and finance, campus planning, information technology, communications, and development. It involves all

stakeholders—faculty, students, staff, alumni, and external partners. Integrated planning helps institutions manage complexity across boundaries by emphasizing strategy building and a long-term outlook through a change prism to inform both institutional direction and nuts-and-bolts planning activities. Thereby the goal becomes *planning to evolve* rather than *planning to plan*. With integrated planning, the results transcend the outcome of traditional planning—an agreed-upon set of goals typically designed for the short term—by shifting the emphasis to developing a sustainable planning culture that changes the tenor and nature of the game.

Planning is ubiquitous in higher education, but often it is fragmented, fails to gather steam, and lacks distributed leadership. It focuses on immediate goals, neglects sufficient follow-through, and lacks a strategic underpinning. This fragmented approach often fosters unmoored and disconnected actions that result in a lack of institutional strategic focus, inefficient or uncoordinated resource usage, division, and stasis. Institutional stasis limits opportunities, exposes threats, and forces (often unenviable) choices. Even where integrated planning has some understood value, a shared understanding of the concept is absent. As a result, practices differ widely across institution type, making it hard to find common language, build momentum, and sustain a movement.

Given that integrated planning is so necessary to build institutions that thrive, why is it so rarely done well? There are many reasons, but three stand out:

- » *A complex environment.* Higher education institutions are complex, and integrated planning requires understanding and navigating this complexity across institutional boundaries.
- » *Cultural constraints.* Higher education institutions face unique challenges because of the distinct and often

disparate operating cultures within and across academic and administrative functions.

- » *Disparate worldviews.* Higher education institutions struggle to leverage planning into lasting change because they lack both a shared understanding of their external threats or opportunities and a knowledge of strategic approaches to respond to either.

Along with these challenges, institutions simply have an undeveloped appreciation or sound value proposition for the importance of integrated planning. It is this lack of a value proposition that motivated us to carry out a survey in 2015. The results were telling.

STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING: RESULTS OF A SURVEY

SCUP surveyed nearly 2,300 higher education professionals to gain input on the state of planning in higher education (Society for College and University Planning and Baker Strategy Group 2015). Respondents came from all institution types across the country¹ and represented planners from all domains. The survey revealed that overall planning effectiveness is viewed as fair at best (figure 1). While respondents express appreciation for the *outcomes* of planning, only those closely involved in planning efforts hold more positive views about the importance and value of planning.

Though respondents indicated their wide involvement in planning efforts, willingness to pay for good educational content *in general*, and desire to engage with peers to share knowledge and best practices *in general*, they currently do not devote time to developing their planning skills or actively connecting with other higher education planners (figure 2). In other words, despite their wide involvement and expressed

1 Ninety-two percent of respondents come from the United States; three percent of respondents are Canadian and five percent of respondents come from a combined 27 countries.

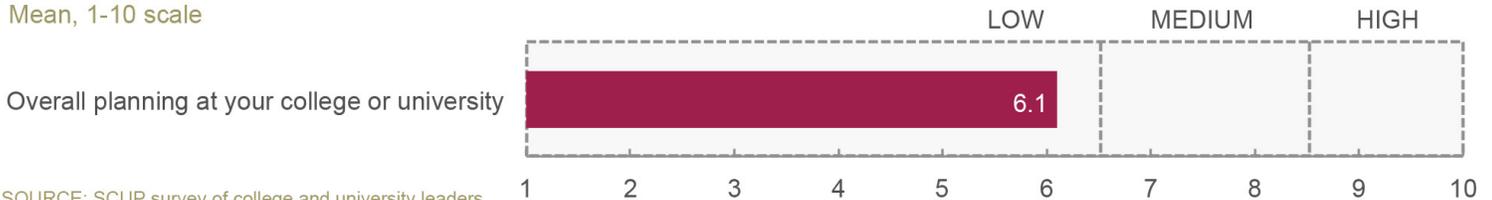
need for better planning skills, respondents do not pursue planning-related professional development even though they expect to be involved in the development of a plan!

In short, there is a development gap in planning. Leaders indicate that they are involved to some degree in strategic plan development, but generally do not actively pursue planning-related professional development (figure 3).

Figure 1 Overall Planning Effectiveness

Overall planning is rated relatively low by college and university leaders

Overall planning rating, n=1,835
Mean, 1-10 scale



SOURCE: SCUP survey of college and university leaders
QUESTION: "Using a 1-10 scale where 1 is 'Poor' and 10 is 'Excellent,' how would you rate the overall planning effectiveness at your college or university?"

• Confidence interval at 95% is 0.1

Figure 2 Planning-Related Professional Development

Campus leaders do not connect with others involved in planning or spend time developing their planning skills

Personal development ratings, n=1,632
Mean, 1-10 scale



SOURCE: SCUP survey of college and university leaders
QUESTION: "Using a 1-10 scale where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 10 is "Strongly Agree," indicate how much you agree with the following statements about your personal development."

• Confidence interval at 95% is 0.1

Figure 3 **Planning Development Gap****Campus leaders are involved in the strategic plan but do not pursue professional development for planning**

Likelihood within the next 12 months, n=1,632

Mean, 1-10 scale



SOURCE: SCUP survey of college and university leaders

QUESTION: "Using a 1-10 scale where 1 is "Not at all Likely" and 10 is "Extremely Likely," how likely are you do the following in the next 12 months?"

• Confidence interval at 95% is 0.1

To shed some light on why these disconnects might exist, we drill down further into the survey results in order to lay the groundwork for integrated planning so that we can answer this question: What about integrated planning fails to resonate and what can we do about it?

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR INTEGRATED PLANNING

We ran a quantitative analysis of the survey results to better understand the climate that best fosters integrated planning. Our aim was to determine both areas of common difficulty with integrated planning across higher education and areas of emphasis that can enable the rich adoption of integrated planning. Seven factors emerged that, if addressed, lay the groundwork for integrated planning and offer the largest potential impact for institutional leaders. For each factor, respondent comments are included to lend color to the analysis.

1. *Develop the value of planning.* It is important for leaders to build and acknowledge the lasting value of integrated planning. A good integrated plan, after all, is anchored by an active and ongoing conversation among a diverse audience of internal and external stakeholders.

This conversation is not only time well spent, but also, in fact, an institutional priority. Unfortunately, such a sound (no less shared) value proposition for the importance of planning is often missing: "There is a lack of broad awareness across the institution about the need for and value of sound planning for the long term; there is too much short-term thinking." This lack of awareness is underscored by resistance to framing planning as an ongoing activity: "Our greatest challenge is leadership who think planning is an event and not a process that never ends and a method for managing the institution." Sometimes there are good intentions, but fatigue sets in so there is little consistency in maintaining a long-term focus on planning: "I'm a new chancellor. Our biggest challenge is a weak history of planning and planning fatigue." Giving planning the proper emphasis will help raise awareness, rightsize expectations, and garner support and resources.

2. *Build planning capacity.* Beyond emphasizing planning as an institutional priority, planning capacity must be built through the development of durable planning practices. At present, the lack of such practices is commonplace: "There is a lack of institutional understanding with regard to the planning process, and

we lack a comprehensive and transparent approach for effective planning.” The building of capacity starts with shared understanding and expectations: “We need a common understanding and expectation for planning, including its benefits and limitations.” Moreover, respondents lack both the knowledge and evaluative tools to help determine what effective planning practice means for their institution: “Evaluating the effectiveness of our current strategic planning and getting commitment from all and getting everyone to the same level of knowledge are our biggest challenges.” It is in developing these practices that institutions learn that planning capacity can be powerfully distributed across institutional boundaries.

3. *Agree on priorities.* There is no shortage of ideas for how to develop a better institution. The difficulty comes when good ideas run counter to a fragmented operating culture and a shortage of time and resources. Even when agreement is achieved within a unit (this is hard enough), departments or divisions struggle to link unit goals to institutional priorities. The lack of emphasis on planning and the paucity of resources committed to planning only exacerbate the problem: Our biggest challenge is “coordinating among diverse constituencies and competing priorities in the face of shrinking resources.” Two prominent themes underscore the challenges that leaders face in coming to agreement on planning priorities. First, the discipline to execute agreed-upon plans is difficult to maintain: “It’s hard to maintain progress when coordinating amongst units with differing goals, priorities, and perspectives.” Second, pet projects or new initiatives enter the planning mix and derail established planning priorities: “Emerging priorities tend to leapfrog over established planned priorities.” Priorities must be established across university cultures and communicated clearly to ensure that new initiatives are in alignment.
4. *Integrate plans across campus boundaries.* Integrated planning challenges leaders to think and act across

boundaries and requires a broad institutional perspective in order to understand and solve complex problems: “Planning is not just an administrative activity, but must be integrated across all cabinet divisions.” Integrated planning can create a platform from which to bridge disparate campus units by developing shared initiatives, leveraging scarce resources, or cultivating informed trade-offs: “We need to build the understanding for the need and ‘how-to’ for integrated planning; we are in dire need of a good planning culture, but are only beginners on our campus.” One challenge in plan integration is planning myopia. In managing complexity, leaders need to guard against competing interests while considering the implications of unit plans on other areas of campus. This can be approached via sound planning practices, but what is really needed is an agreed-upon model. As one survey respondent noted, there is a need to “come to an agreement about an integrated planning model.”

5. *Pursue planning-related professional learning.* To truly develop an integrated planning culture, everyone must be a planner. Professional learning in integrated planning is valued relatively highly among those who do it for a living. Recognizing this value is more challenging, however, for those outside the main planning function. Unfortunately, those who conduct *some* planning along with their other job responsibilities—as opposed to doing planning full time—are least likely to receive proper training on integrated planning. Professional learning is also given short shrift at institutions that may need it the most—those that emphasize short-term outcomes: “Our executive administrators have poor planning skills, minimal management training and do not value planning. They see planning as a hurdle to progress because they want projects done quickly; quality is secondary in importance.” The challenge is to train all planners: “The biggest challenge has been designing training for everyone in a single process for the entire

university.” Ironically, the ones who lack training—those on the periphery of the process—are often the very individuals essential to successful integrated plan development and implementation.

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6. *Be agile.* As we stated earlier, three forces situate higher education as change averse: a complex operating environment, cultural constraints, and disparate worldviews. Our survey underscores these challenges while recognizing the importance of combatting inertia through agility. Integrated planning requires reflexive practice in making good choices with limited resources. When unit plans are well integrated, a culture of planning emerges that allows institutions to be nimble enough to respond to unanticipated threats and opportunities: “Our challenge is deciding what we should stop doing in order to invest claimed resources into what we must do to remain vibrant; this must be pursued in a nimble and responsive fashion.” Respondents note difficulty in reacting to a changing environment and taking the proper action to adjust: “We need to remain sufficiently flexible to deal with the evolving nature of higher education.” Most, if not all, institutions can sufficiently respond to urgencies or undergo short-term transformation. However, institutions will increasingly be required to think, plan, and operate integratively in order to respond more quickly and accurately to impending change.
7. *Manage change.* Change is inevitable. When institutions actively integrate their planning, their approaches to change are more proactive and anticipatory, thereby making it easier to respond to emerging trends or external disruptions. Respondents report low ratings for the ability to manage change at their institutions, especially change that requires foresight and advanced planning. Some struggle with “navigating unpredictable

changes while involving all relevant constituents in the planning process in a thoughtful, productive dialogue,” while others are looking for ways to “adapt the culture to be ready for change.” Beyond responding to a changing market, leaders see a need to trigger change responses before they are forced to change, often in unenviable and unwelcome ways: “Universities are unwilling or unable to see the changes in learning and student demographics that are already occurring.” Unfortunately, many leaders fail to grasp the gravity or implications of change, lack a shared sense of urgency, neglect to recognize the link between change and relevancy, or simply resist change outright.

The difficult task for institutional leaders is to translate their understanding of integrated planning through these seven factors into specific actions that trigger the development of an integrated planning culture. This should be achieved in ways that honor timeless institutional values while simultaneously developing reflexive capacities to adapt and evolve. The next section highlights five essential strategies that will help spark durable, planning-centric climates of change.

TOWARD PLAYMAKING: STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATED PLANNING

Integrated planning is more than strategic planning. Institutions that adopt integrated planning can better navigate complex operating environments, bridge disparate and insular institutional subcultures, and combat the structurally baked-in resistance to change so common in higher education. Five essential strategies are invaluable in developing a culture of integrated planning: (1) balancing creativity and discipline, (2) connecting choices to underlying values, (3) developing planners across the institution, (4) celebrating the “expert-generalist,” and (5) bridging pragmatism and ambition to foster sound implementation.

1. *Balance creativity and discipline via distributed leadership.* To build value and sustain momentum, integrated planning needs steady leadership throughout the institution. Above all, a shrewd balance of creativity and discipline is needed as a foundational platform for change. Creativity is not a scarce resource in higher education; discipline is. Though integrated planning practice can work within units, across units, and as a mechanism for aligning vertically with an overall institutional mission and vision, it is most powerful as an all-encompassing mode of operation underscored by wide buy-in. This buy-in can trigger creative idea generation, thereby opening up the institution to new possibilities. While the president and provost are indeed key, it is important for other leaders to foster and diffuse ownership throughout the institution. Key leaders at all levels in all units must also anchor a disciplined allegiance to a common, agreed-upon planning framework. This is especially important in aligning disparate governance and policy-making bodies, as well as in identifying trade-offs and clarifying decision rights. Developing a healthy, ongoing planning dialogue is easier if there is common purpose underscored by cross-boundary participation.
2. *Connect choices to underlying values.* Integrated planning can also be the platform for developing an overarching strategy that can serve as the intellectual foundation in the linking of disparate institutional plans. This approach can be underscored by what the SCUP Planning Institute calls “the core idea.” While not a strategy itself, the core idea emphasizes strategic focus and a shared understanding of how an institution differentiates itself through the choices it makes. To frame the concept of strategy, SCUP uses this definition: “Strategy is an integrated set of choices that uniquely positions the [institution] ... to create a sustainable advantage and superior value relative to the competition” (Lafley and Martin 2013, p. 3). Framing integrated planning efforts in terms of deliberate strategy building can help campuses understand and navigate complexity while holding true to institutional ideals. It can also force independent units—in spirit and function—to find common ground so that resource trades-offs can identify win-win situations for all involved. Over time, in a choice-driven-by-values context, integrated institutions have a clear sense of the depth and breadth of their budget, organizational capacities, skills, and operational infrastructure. When combined with ongoing engagement with the external environment, this makes for a powerful synergy.
3. *Develop planners across the institution.* As our survey clearly notes, those who plan value planning and those who do not plan tend not to value planning. A natural conclusion is to widen the circle of planners in order to motivate key players across the institutional landscape to adopt integrated planning through co-development. Co-development is a process whereby institutional stakeholders plan together in rich collaboration, ongoing dialogue, and authentic alignment. Co-development fosters a climate of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration and, if implemented properly, forces constant planned (or unplanned) interactions between people from different parts of the institution. A movement to co-develop can be furthered through creative incentives or the pooling of resources for cross-boundary collaborations (using the success of these projects to seed others). Co-development can help break down hierarchy, raise awareness, build morale, pool resources, and shift predictive behaviors toward new possibilities and new organizational rhythms. As a vehicle for practical change, co-development can help articulate the competencies (skills, processes, tools, models, etc.) required to be a well-rounded integrated planner.
4. *Celebrate the “expert-generalist.”* Higher education is full of experts with creative ideas who never meet each other. Over time, participants in an integrated planning culture will begin to operate like “expert-generalists”—

players who come with significant domain experience (expertise in a field or function) complemented by a powerful cross-boundary operating lens (expertise across fields or functions). This could be accomplished by developing and nurturing administrative learning communities that free people from patterned behaviors that foster fragmentation and move them toward new, open platforms for shared practice. Regularly crossing boundaries, mixing divergent points of view, and traversing new landscapes can change perspectives and result in the development of shared language and deep bridge building. While expertise fosters specialization and specialization fosters fragmentation and missed opportunities, expert-generalism can motivate integrated planners to find common ground and more fully engage in the co-creation process campuswide. In a hyper-specialized world, the expert-generalists are true playmakers who bring people together, connect dots, and integrate and make meaning of disparate ideas.

5. *Bridge pragmatism and ambition for sound implementation.* Commonly, planning is reduced to the development of goals to achieve outcomes. While this may sound sufficient for most institutions, it is a limited approach that emphasizes short-term plan development at the expense of building a robust integrated plan that focuses on strategy, embraces the long term, links (and limits) choice to values and actions, and ultimately fosters a culture of implementation. The challenge is to successfully bridge ambition and pragmatism. Most institutions are imbalanced; either they let grand ambitions outpace reality or they are too cautious and pragmatic, potentially undercutting exciting futures. In fact, the most critical element of any strategy is its translation into reality. The book *Ten Types of Innovation* presents a series of “essential tensions,” one of which is to balance pragmatism with ambition: “An essential (and often uncomfortable) part of innovation is committing to solving bold and complicated challenges—especially when you don’t know precisely

how you’ll solve them” (Keeley et al. 2013, p. 195). In a well-built and well-tended integrated planning culture, the balance between ambition and pragmatism is struck in a way that resists painful trade-offs for a more strategically focused, integrated, and healthy operating environment.

To best employ these five essential strategies and move increasingly toward a culture of playmaking, institutions may want to do some initial high-level benchmarking. This can be accomplished through two simple means: by anchoring current and aspirant practices to a maturity model and by framing practice in terms of increasing levels of penetration: practical, organizational, and cultural.

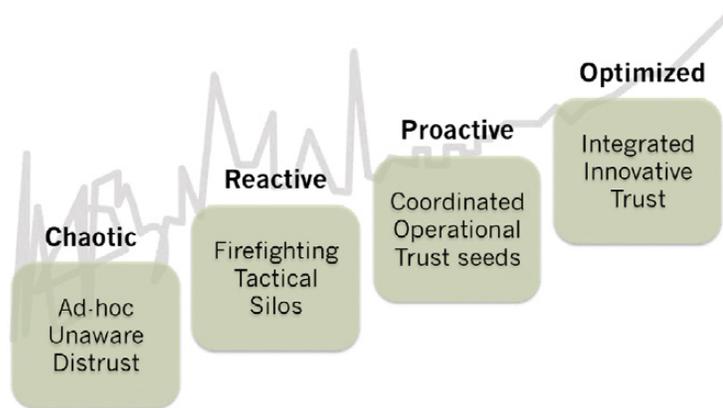
DETERMINING IMPACT: TWO MODELS TO FRAME PRACTICE

While most planning metrics focus on outcomes, there is a need to build a body of evidence to support the integrated planning value proposition and develop workable models to extend this value. Such evidence would solidify the building blocks that make integrated planning work: relationship building across boundaries, authentic alignment, and the application of meaningful change models to higher education problem-solving contexts. These new ways of measuring impact can lead to a shared understanding of integrated planning and widen its applicability as a go-to source for institutional change. Institutions need data, examples, models, tools, and scenarios that support integrated planning as a concept that works and can be applied on their campuses. How does integrated planning make one a better planner? How does integrated planning help us recognize new opportunities? How does integrated planning transform our institutions?

These questions can be approached initially in two related ways through two simple models: maturity and penetration. A *maturity model* is a simple descriptive tool that helps

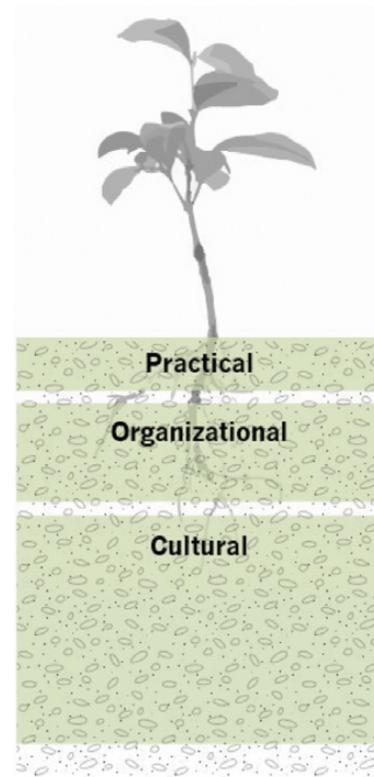
institutions evaluate their baseline capacity for integrated planning (figure 4). It has the potential to not only help institutions determine where they are, but also help them describe and reach their ideal futures. Building off the seven factors and employing the five essential strategies presented earlier can help institutions move from a disconnected, chaotic environment in which planning is ad hoc, internal and external stakeholders are unaware, and the culture is unaligned and ruled by distrust toward a more mature environment that is more integrative, trustworthy, and innovative.

Figure 4 **Integrated Planning Maturity Model**



Integrated planning can also be viewed through a *penetration model*, which helps an institution gauge the depth and durability of its integrated planning practices (figure 5). Institutions can move toward optimized, integrated planning on the maturity model by considering three levels of penetration: practical, organizational, and cultural. The most common penetration level is practical. The practical level involves the linking of plans and planning efforts across the institution; it can often be achieved through the budget process or other incentive devices. It does not necessarily require a strong visionary leader, but it does require consistent, disciplined leaders at the unit or department level. Though it is considered a base level of penetration, the practical level is often an important achievement for many institutions.

Figure 5 **Integrated Planning Penetration Model**



At the organizational level, institutions intentionally design themselves and their organizational practices to foster authentic alignment. This level of engagement typically requires senior leadership champions and buy-in at the unit level. At this level, unit leaders become more comfortable with managing essential tensions and trade-offs and leveraging resources for initiatives that build bridges, trust, and agile operational practices. As might be expected, achieving this level of penetration is harder than achieving the practical level and often not realistic for the reasons we pointed out earlier: a complex operating environment, cultural constraints, and disparate worldviews. Still, it is important for institutions to focus on what can evolve as they work toward organizational penetration: managing the fluidity of boundaries, incentivizing collaboration and experimentation, developing a culture of shared decision making, and making it easier to make choices that matter while ensuring those choices are linked to underlying institutional values.

At the cultural, or highest, level of penetration, all stakeholders communicate, collaborate, and cooperate rhythmically across boundaries. Though often driven by and built upon the organizational level of penetration, the cultural level is the hardest to achieve and requires consistent leadership, broad-based buy-in, and an openness to letting go of legacy practices and perspectives. This level fully embraces and employs the five essential strategies while acculturating key planning approaches such as robust, ongoing engagement with the external environment, an appreciation of durable, ongoing long-term planning practices, and the successful bridging of disparate and insular institutional subcultures.

These three levels of planning penetration—practical, organizational, and cultural—complement the maturity model. Though all three levels are important, the optimized, integrated planning stage corresponds most closely to the cultural level. Once an institution operates at the cultural level in its integrated planning, it can achieve its full playmaking potential. Over time, integrated planning will make its way into a wider group of planner orbits, the institutional lexicon, and the higher education trend cycle, thereby casting it as imperative and indispensable in helping institutions engage with, and prepare for, the future.

CLOSING: ON SEEING THE FLOOR

Winning teams excel at playmaking. Playmakers value integration, understand the conditions under which change is possible, and employ resources to ensure that their institutions are designed to evolve. While building institutional capacity for integrated planning is certainly challenging, it is becoming required practice. Much more than traditional strategic planning, commonplace collaboration, or unit coordination, it has the potential to transform institutions.

While building institutional capacity for integrated planning is certainly challenging, it is becoming required practice.

Though most institutions are not prepared to undergo significant transformation, they can learn to plan together by building bridges among disparate, boundary-spanning players in order to spark fresh ideas and build a movement for change. This can be spurred by designing institutional practices so that boundaries are flexible and fluid, experimentation is incentivized, and choices and actions are shared in germination and focused in implementation. Integrated planning is about more than preparing institutions to respond to change; it is about institutions owning and shaping the future.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

JAMES B. YOUNG is chief learning officer at the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He previously served as chief of staff for information technology and libraries at Lehigh University and founding associate vice president for information services/chief information officer at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology (a start-up university) where he was responsible for building and leading all technology, library, and learning services. He earned a Ph.D. at George Mason University, a master's degree at the University of Michigan,

and a bachelor's degree at Michigan State University.

Previously, he was employed for 10 years at George Mason University where he led initiatives in curriculum development and integration, libraries, learning communities, and assessment.

MARGARET J. BAKER received her Ph.D. in Asian languages and cultures from the University of Michigan, her master's in East Asian languages and civilizations from Harvard University, and her bachelor's in comparative literature from Princeton University. She draws on her academic background, fluency in Mandarin, and past work in China and Japan to meet the challenges of cross-cultural communications both in business and the community. She also finds an outlet for her interest in education policy and helping international families through her extensive volunteering in the Ann Arbor public schools, where her five children are currently enrolled.

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WHAT IS INTEGRATED PLANNING?

Integrated planning is the linking of vision, priorities, people, and the physical institution in a flexible system of evaluation, decision-making and action. It shapes and guides the entire organization as it evolves over time and within its community.