



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 8)

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I recently blogged about what Bob Joyce shared during the most recent session of Faculty Lunches with the Dean. Carl Stenberg and Ann Anderson were the other faculty members who shared something about their work—this post summarizes the information that Carl shared, and I'll talk about Ann's work in the next one. The conversations continue to be rich and interesting.



Carl Stenberg

[Carl Stenberg](#). Carl talked about a project he is going to work on during his Faculty Development



Assignment, which is another initiative that emerged from the Strategic Foresight process. Carl is working with Lydian Altman in looking at issues around strategic planning in North Carolina. Our [strategic public leadership](#) model helps local governments develop clear priorities, determine resources needed to pursue those priorities, and identify ways to assess progress toward implementation and results. The School has worked with lots of local governments and other organizations to facilitate their development of strategic plans.

This research project partly has grown out of our frustration that public-official clients may not be using the planning process in ways that are likely to produce meaningful results. For example, there is a sense that planning goals are not being connected with budget decisions. Is it possible that officials feel like they have to do strategic planning, and then they treat it as a check-the-box exercise without following through to implement their goals and evaluate their impact?



Lydian Altman

Carl and Lydian are investigating four questions:

- How widespread is strategic planning in North Carolina?
- How are strategic plans used in decision-making?
- Why have some jurisdictions not engaged in strategic planning?
- What has been the impact of a strategic plan (or the lack of one) on manager-elected official relationships?

The first phase of the project was a literature review, and now they are conducting a survey (developed with Kim Nelson) of all local government managers and elected officials in North



Carolina. Another phase of the project will involve a focus group at the North Carolina City-County Management Association winter seminar in February—and there may be follow-up interviews with managers and elected officials depending on the survey results.



Kim Nelson

There are a lot of resources invested in strategic planning—time and money—and it is highly appropriate to ask whether it makes a difference. Is it more effective than we might imagine? If not, could it be done in ways that might make it more effective? Or is it something that we shouldn't do because the results under most circumstances are unlikely to justify the effort spent on the process.

I think it is great that we are taking a thoughtful look at the impact of strategic planning on local governments in North Carolina. It also is an opportunity to contribute to knowledge in the field about strategic planning. The academic literature includes a range of views about the value of strategic planning, including questions about whether most of it truly is strategic and whether some approaches are more likely to achieve strategic results than others. Our own work last year with Strategic Foresight was an effort to experiment with a planning process that seemed more aligned with the culture of an academic organization—and it tried to force us to look harder at possible futures for the School. I think it worked well for us and it produced tangible initiatives that otherwise might not have emerged. That includes the Faculty Development Assignment that Carl will use in March and April to write a report on the results of this important research. I can't wait to read it.