10 Plans and their situated actions

Introduction

The allusion in the title of this chapter is deliberate. Apart from Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Lucy Suchman's *Plans and Situated Actions* (2007) is probably the most widely cited ethnomethodological work.[1] What matters for us here (and this is why we have chosen the paraphrase we have) is not that Suchman's book had an extraordinary impact on the technical discipline of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), but the pointers its central ideas might offer us with regard to our own materials. Whilst it is certainly true Suchman's study opened up a whole new approach of what came to be called 'ethnomethodologically informed ethnography' for researchers in HCI, Computing Science and Cognitive Science and so stimulated what was called a 'turn to the social' in those disciplines, what is of importance for us here is the centrality she gives to the problem of mutual intelligibility in her analysis.

The core of *Plans and Situated Actions* is an attack on a psychological theory called 'The Planning Model', at the time the dominant approach used in Cognitive Science (see Miller et al. 1960). This model was rooted in a conception of human action as the instrumental achievement of goals, with courses of action taking the form of a projection in the mind of a sequence of steps which serve as a means toward achieving a desired goal, those anticipated steps then being enacted in behaviour. On this view, action is the working through or implementing of planned tasks defined as 'sequences of actions designed to accomplish some preconceived end' (Suchman 2007: 52). As such, the planning model is really only a derivative of the instrumental rationalist approach to human conduct. Using arguments, examples and methods from the classical corpus of Ethnomethodology, Suchman showed the planning model is not an adequate description of our experience of interaction in general nor of human computer interaction in particular. This is because the planning model generally takes 'the problem of mutual intelligibility' for granted. Using a machine to achieve some desired end depends on both user and machine resolving the double contingency and satisfactorily interpreting each other's actions. As her experiments demonstrated, because mutual intelligibility had not been considered to be relevant, resources for its resolution are entirely missing from system designs which deploy the planning model. In episodes remarkably similar to Garfinkel's breaching experiments, Suchman's users were

left to thrash around trying to work out what the machine had done, was doing, and was likely to do and so what they themselves should do next. In its turn, the machine could only respond in accordance with its pre-programmed steps. If what the user did was at variance with what the program expected, the machine had no resources with which to work out what to do, and so froze. Suchman pinned her analysis to the contrast between the users' improvisational strategies for working out what the machine was doing and the machine's fixed repertoire of responses. For Suchman, this taught a seemingly general lesson about the nature of action, that it is ~~through and through~~ improvised rather than planned, meaning that the usability of computational systems can only be improved by reconceiving action as the improvised, moment-by-moment, locally organised achievement of mutual intelligibility.

Suchman's demolition of an algorithmic conception of action was undoubtedly highly successful. That conception is based upon a metaphorical extension of our common sense notion of plans and planning. It translates the deliberative character of our ordinary sense of planning into a task-centred conceptual model for the psychology of human and artificial reasoning. This is taken into the model as the idea that action is the following of recipes for accomplishing tasks and, of course, it is this which fails so dramatically because it makes no provision for the plain fact that people are often working out what to do as they go along.

Suchman's eyes are on the character of social interaction and the failure of the instrumental rationalism of the planning model to provide for mutual intelligibility. The focus is on the machine's failures not the detailed constitution of the user's experience through the use of improvised methods of reasoning to resolve the meaning of the machine's actions. Her topic was not the intelligibility of formal plans and planning per se, but of machines as rule-bound interpreters.

This is not the case with Dalvir Samra-Fredericks' 'ethnomethodologically informed' investigation of strategic planning (Samra-Fredericks 2010). Here, strategic organisational planning is the locus of the interactional work of jointly reading, amending and otherwise editing a common resource, namely the written plan. Using discourse analytic methods loosely based on Conversation Analysis, Samra-Fredericks traces the sequential organisation of a stretch of meeting talk in which interpretations and formulations are agreed, sequences of topics determined and likely issues summarised. We see how considerations such as the ordering and emphasising of particular points and the management of 'the politics' of extrinsic interests are expressed as topics in the talk. The one thing we don't see is how the plan being discussed is constituted as a plan, nor ~~how~~ what those discussing the plan bring to its interpretation as an organisational object.

Tim Dant and Dave Francis (1998) take us part way to that objective with their description of planning in a Health Authority and a school. The two organisations are chosen by Dant and Francis because they operate in contrasting ways in their planning activity. They see the two organisations as involving two different models of planning, which they term 'rationalistic' and 'contingent' models respectively. Their conception of the rationalistic model is derived from the standard rational actor model, the psychology of which strongly informed the planning

model in Cognitive Science. Their identification of the 'contingent model' affiliates their conception with Suchman's arguments from Ethnomethodology. Dant and Francis are interested in how plans are used in the planning work people do. From the cases they examine, they suggest plans are used as contingent rationalisations of possible actions. Such rationalisations emerge in an ad hoc way within the flow of planning discussions and serve a number of important functions such as: offering a context for the synthesis of different activities, a means of aligning the actions of different organisations, a repository of value statements, a script for addressing political and other external considerations, and an all-purpose justification of unforeseen and approved actions. Unlike Samra-Fredericks, Dant and Francis do show plans as organisationally relevant resources in the determination of managerial and other courses of action. However, the organisational particularities of their material and managerial construction are not addressed.

The same cannot be said of Kjeldt Schmidt and Inna Wagner's (2004) discussion of the plans they observed used in an architectural office. They are very much taken with the material realisation of plans themselves in the form of blueprints, maps and diagrams and their purposeful use as locally organised coordinating and ordering devices for complex courses of action. They emphasise the heterogeneity of the plans found in their research site. These plans were designed using very different specifications, levels of precision and media, and used for very different purposes. The types ranged from 'back of an envelope' sketches to white-board displays to fully developed computer-aided design (CAD) drawings. In each case, they 'afforded' different interactional uses.

The character of CAD drawings was of particular importance. Below is a summary of a number of key features of these objects which Schmidt and Wagner identify:

A standardised format defines sets of conventions and codes for identifying and validating the plan's contents and their specification as well as for defining the scope of the document's distribution;

A layered organisation of representations allows a palimpsest of views to be built up whereby the modularised 'whole' can be seen through the serial consideration and mutual explicativeness of each individual component;

Provision of inventories of named objects and devices to be deployed as part of the construction. This catalogue offers generic description of objects which are 'localised' in the particularities of any specific drawing.

Detailed drawings offer the same localisation for abstract signifiers (boxes, names, sketches) used in the layers.

The management of the use of the objects used in planning is the function of a highly structured repository where the corpus of drawings used on the project is stored and tracked. The code system for storing, retrieving, distributing and tracking is one of the formatted conventions constituting the contents of the drawing.

Viewed as socially constructed organisational objects, the composite CAD drawings are not *post hoc* representations of the structure of the building-being-built. Rather, they are an *ex ante* mechanism for producing or imposing order on the building's construction-in-flight. They constitute a 'constructable order' which, if followed, will allow the building to be built. What makes the set of drawings a plan is the recognisability of that constructable order in the organisation of the plethora of detail they contain. Construing, adapting, detailing and amending the constructable order of the drawings is the achievement of plans as lebenswelt pairs.

The Schmidt and Wagner discussion identifies features in common with our own case, the revised strategic plan put together in 2008 by the senior team at CU. We will demonstrate how, as a written-read lebenswelt pair consisting of the plan account and the planning undertaken, the revised planning document provided the 'constructability' of a sustainable future for the newly launched venture. The plan provides instructions for producing planning as a constructable order for the future of CU. The set of integrated and related documents and activities making up the revised plan is a complex construction. We concentrate only on one component, the part labelled 'Review of Core Assumptions', which designates the first steps in the planning process.

The Review of Core Assumptions

The Review of Core Assumptions was produced as input to the kick-off meeting for a typical management activity, a mid-cycle review of strategy. A reminder of a little historical context may be helpful for the understanding the issues in play:

> CU became operational in 2005 in preparation for its launch in 2006. A small management team had guided the development of the organisation and its related capital planning. The original strategic plan adopted a three-phased planning horizon:
>
> Phase 1: 2005/07. This was the start-up phase and included the first year of full operation. The initial purpose built facilities would be constructed.
>
> Phase 2: 2007–12. This was the expansion phase when student number growth was to accelerate and the second round of capital development would take place.
>
> Phase 3: 2012/13. This was the stabilisation phase. Student numbers were projected to reach 5,000 FTEs at the end of the period, the campus build would be complete and the institution would be seeking independence from its university sponsors.
>
> The mid-cycle review was undertaken during late 2008 and completed early 2009. The resulting plan was to be implemented in the academic year 2009/10. Its outcomes were to be any necessary strategic course corrections required as a result of the experience of operating CU in 'shadow mode' during 2006/07 and full mode in 2007/08. The review team were the most senior managers of the organisation. In the end, the mid-cycle review gave rise to a major re-organisation.

The kick-off meeting for developing the revised strategy was held in October 2008. During the day, the management team reviewed the assumptions underlying the original plan and undertook SWOTs[2] on the academic, organisational and market strategies. The CEO had circulated a briefing setting out objectives for the day along with the agenda. Each section of the agenda had its own bundle of background documents. We will look at the review of the assumptions underlying the original plan and will cite relevant sections from this document in the text.

Like the workbook of financial forecasts discussed in Chapter 5, the Review of Core Assumptions[3] (RCA) was produced *for* a meeting, not *in* a meeting. Its character as a management object is shaped by the fact it was to be read prior to a meeting. In the meeting, it was subject to much face-to-face discussion (and not a little wrangling) during which its central thrust was formulated and re-formulated several times. The ultimate review of core assumptions was the lebenswelt pairing of the written-read document (the RCA 'review account') and the revised assumptions feeding into the revised strategic plan.

Methods for co-producing the review of core assumptions

As a written-read document, the RCA trades on taken-for-granted understandings about the state of the organisation formulated in the rest of the circulated package of documents. It also trades on shared assumptions about the roles and attitudes of its presumed readers. In that sense, every element of the package is replete with things it does not have to say in so many words. The managers for whom it was written know what the review is about and what are the issues. They also understand the process they are engaged in. This shared knowledge is visible in the methods used to co-produce the review. To bring out their character, we will cast these methods as instructions for finding the written-read review in the RCA and its assemblage of documents.

Decipher the agenda in the Agenda

The RCA is designed to be read alongside the general agenda, the briefing and the other documents provided for this agenda item (the original assumptions and a schedule for the review). Its character (along with the other documents) projects an 'agenda' in the Agenda. This agenda configures what this meeting is about in the sense of what the topics might actually imply in detail and what outcomes they might lead to. This projected agenda is often described – for instance, by John Law (1994) – as marking a difference between the formal specification of the meeting and its actual performativity. The circulated papers are to be construed as providing the rationale for the Agenda (that is, the rationale behind the decontexualised list of things specified to be done) and a bundle of projected courses of action. This rationale is the CEO's agenda in (or behind) the circulated agenda. Setting the agenda in the Agenda is what the assemblage of this written-read document does.

Strategic planning is a well-known, standard, specific, recognisable and 'routinely structured' management activity. It has well-known phases, well-known types of inputs and well-known types of outputs and consequent actions. The relevances attributable to the RCA are derived from where in the course of planning it is introduced. As the review proceeds, some things will be found to be routine. Others will turn out to be less so. Part of the work of the review projected in the RCA is to re-frame how the course of the whole strategic planning exercise will unfold.

One of the documents circulated was a schedule. Although the steps this sets out are the conventional ones, a quick skim of the detail shows rather than

Table 10.1 CU planning schedule

Action	Responsibility	Timeline for completion	Process connection
Review and amendment of current assumptions and driver statements for strategies	Executive	Kick-off mtg	
Approval of amended assumption and driver statements	Executive	25 Oct. 2008	
Review of implications of revisions for 2007–12 targets	Executive	4 Nov. 2008	
Consideration of flow through of target changes to Business Unit plans and targets	Faculties, LN & Portfolios	19 Dec. 2008	Outbound to Planning
Modelling of implications for 2007–12 business plan	CD/EF	19 Dec. 2008	
Approval of revised Business Units 2007–12 targets and plans. Approval of revised 2007–12 business plan	Executive SMG	14 Jan. 2009	Outbound to Planning
Approval of Academic Strategy Statement for consultation	Executive	31 Jan. 2009	Inbound from Academic Strategy
Re-drafting 2007–12 Strategy Statement	CD	27 Mar. 2009	
Approval of revised 2007–12 Strategy Statement including Academic Strategy Statement	Executive	30 April 2009	Inbound from Academic Strategy
Review of revised 2007–12 Strategy Statement	LN Strategic Management Meeting	18 June 2009	
Approval of revised 2007–12 Strategy Statement	P&R Committee	2 July 2009	
Approval of revised 2007–12 Strategy Statement	CU Board	24 July 2009	

simply running over a standard, lightweight process, the aim is to deliver a completely revised plan.

From the number of approval steps and the range of bodies to be consulted, it is clear that this is not a 'light touch', 'steady as she goes' process. Significant change is being proposed with the rationale for the scale of change being presented to numerous bodies in order to secure their involvement and support. The Briefing Note circulated by the CEO in the package similarly carried messages about the need to manage a complex decision process:

> The process for developing the academic strategy must be an inclusive one, embracing staff at CU and across the Learning Network. Inevitably, this will mean that the process will be lengthy and complex. To prevent progress on the academic strategy delaying immediate planning for 2009/10 and the review of more operational aspects of the overall strategy, I propose to run these processes in parallel. They will be brought together in early spring 2009 to ensure alignment for the 2009/10 plan. AB will continue to lead the planning process. I will lead the processes for developing the academic strategy and the overall strategy. My expectation is that all these processes will be driven and coordinated by the Executive.

The circulated documents are 'first formulations'. They are working documents rather than 'throw aways' or 'formal records'. They are first descriptions or enumerations of the forces shaping the organisation's strategy. These first formulations are important because no matter where in the plan-in-production process the discussion reaches, the only record of the planning process is the produced plan itself. The plan-as-record stands for the decisions taken but not the work of taking them. The RCA will not appear within the revised strategic plan but will, of course, be immanent in it. The review it articulates sets 'the boundary conditions' on the objectives adopted in the plan.

First formulations are important organisational objects. They circumscribe the space of discussion they nominate. In the RCA, this circumscription is contained in the answers to 'Where are we now?'. This question has a dual character: where are we now with regard to progress on the strategy? And where are we with regard to completing the planning of the strategy? These are different but very closely related questions. Fixing their answers is a crucial first move in setting the bounds of any revision to current objectives and targets, as well as the selection of a strategy for achieving such revisions.

Objectives, targets and proposed actions are the standard constituents of a review. What the RCA says about those 'givens' defines the progress made thus far on the strategy. The field of possibilities for the review is, thereby, a narrowed, not an open, one. The purpose of the organisation is fixed, as are the global objectives. All managers in the organisation know these, at least at the level of summarising slogans: year on year 10% per annum growth in student numbers; financial sustainability in five years; in-year balanced books. Whatever senior managers decide to do next, whatever strategies are revised

or unveiled, continuity of purpose regarding these objectives will be assumed and is what the proposed actions will be measured against. Because they were agreed by all the stakeholders and laid out in the foundation documents submitted to the various approval and funding agencies, a mid-term review cannot, on its own initiative, decide to scrap them. The set will remain the 'ostensible objectives' unless or until they are manifestly not going to be achieved. Second, defining the organisational implications of 'managing for financial sustainability' as opposed to 'managing so the books balance' is known to be a central 'unresolvable' (a 'wicked problem') in the rolling planning process. The difference between the two management strategies centres on the generation of the level of investment required to allow CU to become financially self-sufficient, and the length of time over which it might be achieved. In the planning undertaken so far, what sustainability might entail has never been clarified and was recognised to be unclarifiable because both the relevant data was not available and the organisation had not yet garnered enough experience of running in operational mode. For those undertaking the review, what the idea of sustainable development at CU might actually mean in terms of the necessary real-world management actions was entirely opaque.

The timing of the meeting and its package of documents are important in other ways. The strategic plan is still being worked through. Everyone shares a common organisational history and the plan-in-production (like many other documents which will be used during its construction) will be treated as a summary historiography of that production. The constructable order of changes to strategic direction will be discoverable as the formal account of the plan. The historiography is carried by the use of 'perfect' and 'future perfect' tensing. One of the central tasks in constructing the plan as historiography will be arriving at formulations which enable a range of projected future organisational gestalts to be construed so everyone 'can at least live with' what the review proposes.[4] The RCA is the first formulation of the historiography of the organisation's current position. For the manager encountering this historiography, it raises the key questions: 'Can everyone live with it?' and 'What does the answer to that question imply?'

Solve the synecdoche problem

The 'first formulations' are designed to be read against one another. Reading the RCA in the light of these other documents also means reading the others in the light of the RCA. What they import, their implicature, is grasped from this iterative reading.[5] All these first formulations are read as intentional documents. They have a coordinated character. Relative play in that coordination will be used as a resource for the pursuit of particular interests and concerns. In that sense, a planning process is a design process. First formulations are used to fix things in place so they can ~~later~~ act as constraints on later fixings.

There is a second aspect to the synechdoche problem. Everyone knows planning (and especially strategic planning) is path dependent. It is impossible to deliver an implementable plan if prior decisions are constantly revised. Recursive

decision re-visiting through re-interpretation in the light of later decisions of what original decision mean and what implications they have, will cause the process to implode. Everyone knows and accepts this.[6] The RCA specifies the first steps on the path. Once agreed, these will be hard to revise.

One of the background agreements preceding the start of the strategy review was the need to integrate academic and organisational plans. The organisational strategy was to be designed to lock into the academic strategy. The approach to this was largely unfamiliar to most of the participants. The idea of interlocking was not intellectually challenging. At the general level, it was clear it meant the academic and organisational strategy should be complementary both in terms of the objectives set and general implementation plans formulated. What was new and challenging was how to ensure and manage it *all the way down* to specific lines of action that might be taken by particular management teams whilst, at the same time, undertaking the first major strategic review. Thus each bundle of documents was to be taken as draft instructions for achieving interlocking. This strategy exercise was not a development process or a dummy run. The degree of integration visible in the two strategies at the end of the strategy process would be the degree of integration in the strategic plan, and hence the degree of integration the team and the organisation would have to construct, manage and live with.

The RCA is the first item on the agenda. Strategising is path dependent so part of the meaning of this document is to be found in the implications of its positioning for the trajectory of whole planning process. It is the projection of what the list of steps in Table 10.1 will actually turn out to be. This is not just a 'political with a small p' observation. Quite what the document finally means, implies, or determines will be discovered retrospectively in the historiography of the unfolding planning process. Proposals developed later will be compared to the revised core assumptions. However, the core assumptions also imply some of those actions. The RCA offers a preview of 'what this planning process will turn into' and 'what we will find ourselves having to do'. Pairing the review account and the review is the work of shaping outcomes and their actions in the context of the projections to be found in the RCA.

Follow the standardised format

The RCA is a table of summary statements of assumptions, dependencies, proposals and their rationalisation. Here are the first two rows.

Reading left to right, the table follows a familiar 'then' and 'now' linearity. The commentary rationalisation lays out a proposed historiography for each row. Each assumption is allocated to a strategic 'component': governance, student numbers, strategic partnerships, and sustainability. For the team, this structure is novel but transparent. In the 2005 plan, the assumptions were gathered differently. This new structure provides for a different way of locating the components in the strategic architecture. This is, then, a reframing of the discussion and planning undertaken prior to 2006. It allows triangulation on 'Where are we now?' by thematising how planning will proceed. In other words, the heads of terms for the draft plan are

Table 10.2 RCA governance

Domain	Assumption 2006	Dependency	PROPOSED confirm/ revise/open	Commentary 2008
Governance	Increased collaboration but no mergers between regional HEIs. Pattern of HE provision fixed	HEFE national strategy and HEI strategic and financial positions	Confirm	Nationally RAE outcomes will lead to some re-alignments. Regionally, we are likely to see strategic relationships develop. Not clear what New University Challenge will mean. Also future of Oldborough not clear. Seeside and CU big enough challenges on their own for RUN and RUS. Lack of certainty regarding policy post-2010 and potential change in Govt. However, any impacts will be towards the end of the strategy period.
	CU model remains in place over the planning period	Assumption 1	Confirm	Scale of deficits for start-up period together with uncertainty over future development will act as a barrier to any change in relationships. Positively, the CU initiative is a flagship collaboration around which others can be built. Reservations within both universities will be overcome if 'competitive independence' is not seen to be on the agenda. HEFCE will be unlikely to support changes until future is certain. Need 4,000 FTEs for degree-awarding powers. Independence pointless without this.

laid out in the structure of the RCA. The RCA is a formulation of what the revised plan will come to be.

The structure of the table carries considerable freight.

1   The row listings might appear to be of equal importance, but they embed an organisational model and hence have a causal texture. The logic is an unfolding, containing, or waterfall one. The first three (Governance, Student numbers and Strategic partnerships) are mutually interdependent. The fourth, Sustainability, depends on the previous three. The top-down order of the row lists portrays causal relationships.
2   The left-to-right reading of the table provides for both the formulation of possible revisions in the strategy and how they might be implemented. Hence it configures the constructability of the organisation which is the core of the plan. It points forward to the plan with each cell formulation transforming shared knowledge, understandings and actions into unfolding lines of consequences which will have (more or less) obvious implications over the planning period. Once those implications are agreed (or reformulated so everyone 'can live with them'), the pathway to achieving the objectives can be set (or, if absolutely necessary, the row can be looped and the objectives revised).

The RCA is nothing less than a working architecture for the developing strategy. With this architecture in hand, planning can begin. The degree of agreement on the work the document sets out foreshadows and scales the first tasks to be achieved.

Find a plan for the planning in the RCA

The structure provides an architecture for strategic planning. It also is a plan for that planning. The contrastive pairs of assessments indicate the extent of the exercise. The unfolding implication of the table is the need for complete revision. That is the agenda in the Agenda.

The written-read RCA structures the planning process by formatting how the review is to be carried out. In that sense, it is 'instructional' and the planning it proposes would be a course of 'instructed action'. The instructions are carried in the implications of the 'then' and 'now' statements and make up the format of the plan. The original format of the existing strategic plan was developed for Phase I and an understandable preference for representational continuity will encourage close approximation to that format.[7]

Resolve the modal transformations of the cell entries

The review applies the usual tabular grammar. The left-right, top-down organisation is its syntax. The ordering of rows (1 to 13) is not just a device for referencing the assumptions. It is also a process ordering. This is not a funnel

Table 10.3 RCA sustainability

Sustainability	Curriculum development and associated recruitment will provide the basis for growth in academic culture	Assumption 4 Assumption 5	Revise	Growth trajectories look more difficult to achieve and so levels of recruitment will not be of a scale and pace originally envisaged. This will hamper growth in academic culture and may lead to internal competition across the LN and hub. Investment in new academic staff especially in new discipline areas is already severely constrained and likely to become more so over the next 3–4 years. This will hamper opportunities for growth in new areas.
	Economies of scale and increased efficiencies will release investment to support academic development	Assumption 10	Open	Projected salary, pension and other inflation costs could consume any efficiency gains. In any event, to achieve such gains there will need to be investment and major re-organisation and rationalisation. The perceived limitations of the SHA contract mean efficiency gains in HWS may be limited. The rigidity of the contract may limit capacity to re-organise.

(from the macro to the micro, or from the political to the financial). It is a causal sorting of 'drivers' on the final two rows, 12 and 13. The logic runs across the rows (domain → assumption → dependency → proposal → commentary) and matches the expected institutional due process of assessment. It provides a normative model for how each decision should be made. The meaning of the option choices (confirm/revise/open) cannot be 'understood' (that is, what they might imply cannot be grasped) without reading the rationale. At this point, though, it is not clear what the terms 'revise' and 'open' do actually mean. During the discussion of each line, what the decision implies will be projected back onto the table. The 'proposed' column becomes, then, a crucial fulcrum on which understanding the table turns. It is the 'revise' and 'open' rows to which attention is being directed. The 'proposed' column provides a path through them. The design of the column uses a known range of possible decisions to throw focus on the implications of 'revise' and 'open'.

What the transformations in the cells, rows and columns are about is, of course, common knowledge. Known events, decisions, processes and their histories are being reformulated as historiography. To see how this is done, let's look at two examples.

The organisational model is a star network.[8] The balance between the hub and the network and between the network members themselves has become an emerging issue. This had two components. Some partners wanted to start courses which appeared to be duplicates of offerings the hub had or was planning. In addition, one centre was growing much faster than the others (as well as faster than the hub). The notion of 'balance of growth' implied exercising control over the distribution of student numbers. The original assumption was that balance meant uniform growth rates everywhere. This was no longer the case. One partner was surging whilst the delay in new build was holding the hub back. Two other centres were historic competitors. Finally, in one centre, HE was a major

Table 10.4 RCA network growth

3	Balance of growth between the Hub and LN remains broadly constant	Continued broad parity in growth rates	Open	In initial period, growth in the LN (especially B) may be easier to achieve than in the Hub (proportionally if not in volume terms). This may over time lead to a reduction in skewing. There may also be issues arising over internal competition.
				Two important factors are the future of O (small numbers but in potential growth areas) and the G and L arrangements
				Outcomes of Local Govt review may also impact G and L.

cost rather than a revenue stream. On the other hand, it was felt that the site's specialism might support development of potentially attractive courses. What this row stands for is a debate over the distribution of student numbers. The numbers have to be put where they would be used. But that would inevitably shift resources around. These decisions would be important, and not just politically. With further significant increase in the burgeoning partner would come demands for greater infrastructure support. That would stretch the support organisations. Row 3, then, intimates a briar patch of issues which will have to have been resolved as part of producing a workable plan.

A second set of modal transformations relate to assumptions underlying the original growth model. It had been assumed initiatives undertaken by the County and the regional Learning and Skills Council (LSC) would contribute to the raising of aspiration among the local 18–21 population, ~~of~~ which aggressive CU marketing could take advantage. However, this is a long-term strategy at best. At the point at which the review was initiated, it looked as if this strategy wasn't working. The LSC was in turmoil after the announcement of its closure. The County's proposal to re-organise its schools had failed. Moreover, the new CEO of the County was seeking to reduce not enhance the County's role in managing service provision. 'Revise' here is an instruction to assume this potential driver is inoperative or weak. The local level of HE aspiration among 18–21-year-olds was

Table 10.5 RCA external drivers of growth

8	LSC and SCC initiatives will raise aspiration and achievement sufficiently to offset demographic down turn	Success and speed of policy implementation	Revise	18–21 population will decline post-2012 but 25–49 population will increase. This will mean likely increase in pt and WBL. In 18–21 population, proportion of females will continue to grow. Also differential birth rates mean high proportion of middle class in 18–21. Non-EU recruitment will fall. Not clear what the impact of Eastern European immigration will be.
				Raising aspiration and achievement is a long-term process. Current momentum will only be impacted marginally by LSC and County re-organisation. However, continued uncertainty about local arrangements will start to have an effect.
				A number of key initiatives have been initiated and CU has taken a watching brief on them.

Table 10.6 RCA internal drivers of growth

12	Sustainability	It will be a challenge to enable curriculum development and associated recruitment to provide the basis for growth in academic culture	Assumption 4 Assumption 5	Growth trajectories look more difficult to achieve and so levels of recruitment will not be of a scale and pace originally envisaged. This will hamper growth in academic culture and may lead to internal competition across the LN, College and hub. Investment in new academic staff especially in new discipline areas is already severely constrained and likely to become more so over the next 3 – 4 years. This will hamper opportunities for growth in new areas.
13		Economies of scale and increased efficiencies must be achieved to release investment to support academic development	Assumption 10	Projected salary, pension and other inflation costs could consume any efficiency gains. In any event, to achieve such gains there will need to be investment and major re-organisation and rationalisation. The perceived limitations of the SHA contract mean efficiency gains in Health may be limited. The rigidity of the contract may limit capacity to re-organise.
14		Diversification of income and revenue streams will take place only slowly	Assumptions 9, 12, 13,	CU lacks the skill base, facilities and processes to rapidly expand and diversify its non-HEFCE and non-SHA income base.

and is chronically low. To 'Accept' this assumption would mean to accept that the policy drivers were (at least to some extent) ineffective. The implication of adopting 'Revise' is that even if the organisation was awarded more student numbers, it would be unlikely to use them. Such an outcome would threaten confidence at the Funding Council in the organisation's potential. When row 8 is seen in the context of row 3, clear tensions emerge about the shaping of the plan. The burgeoning centre is a middle-class town with lots of residents working in a nearby boom city. It can fill its numbers and more. Funding all the growth possible there would provide a counterweight to the lack of aspiration elsewhere but would ~~severally~~ strain the agreed delivery model. The question raised by these two rows is simply 'How much strain will the model stand?'

The rows in the table set out budgets of issues to be resolved. As with all such budgets, the key questions will be 'How much of an issue is it?' and 'What can be done about it?' The tabular formulations transform what everyone knows about the issues (the common history) into proposed answers to these two questions. Some (the 'revised' options) attract potentially straightforward answers and hence decisions – for example, revise = scale back growth aspirations. Others (the open ones) are labels for scoping exercises which will have to be carried out. Working through the table is a shaping or profiling of the meeting's agenda and an initial specification of the agenda in the Agenda.

The critical rows are the last three.

These rows construe the central problems of the organisation. The terms 'academic development', 'academic culture', 'economies of scale' and 'efficiencies' are management codes for what has been endlessly discussed as three of the major barriers to growth. For lots of historical reasons, staff tended to see themselves as solely teachers of the institutionalised body of knowledge defined for their disciplines, rather than active contributors to that body of knowledge. As a consequence, the urge to develop 'new courses' outside the scope of the standard or traditional curriculum was often resisted. Increased resources would be needed to change this by bringing in 'new blood' and by funding 'research time', 'career re-direction' and the like. The only way to generate such resources was to find efficiencies, but the nature of the organisation and its adopted delivery model severely restricted options here. Neither the academic nor the support organisations were running with spare resource. To finance the development of the academic culture, cost would have to be reduced across the whole organisation. But that can only be done by massive re-structuring. This conclusion is what rows 12, 13 and 14 imply. If the organisation doesn't re-structure, then it will not survive the changes to its environment listed in rows 1–11. What are presented as simple revisions to the basic assumptions of the strategy turn out to be proposals for major re-organisation. And that *is* the agenda in the Agenda.

Summary

The RCA and the schedule of steps are not a plan; they are a critical pre-figuring of what a plan to provide constructable future for CU should be. This pre-figuring is

the agenda in the Agenda, an interpretation of current state and tasks to be under-taken which constitutes the scale of the planning task and its outcomes. Arriving at this interpretation is the closing of praxeological gap between the planning account given in the RCA and the schedule and the planning to be undertaken. The recipient-designed nature of the RCA and the schedule facilitates that gap closing work by means of the methods we have identified. As written-read docu-ments, the RCA and the schedule enable the consociate achievement of mutual understanding. Those who are 'proper readers' of the document (that is, the senior management team embarking on the Mid Term Review) can find the 'proper read-ing' (the agenda in the Agenda) put there for them to find. Once again, mutual intelligibility and the coordination of action is achieved. In saying this, we are *not* saying that having understood what was being proposed, all the team (or indeed, any of them) accepted it. That is not what we are claiming. Significant debate did, indeed, ensue. What we are saying, and this is all we are claiming, is that for the debate to be had, *first* mutual understanding of what was in hand had to be achieved and the greater part of that understanding was accomplished outside the meeting through the co-production of these written-read documents as an exercise in consociate management – that is action at a distance.

Notes

1 It was originally published as Suchman (1987). The second edition was retitled *Human Machine Reconfigurations* (Suchman 2007) and included reflections on the subsequent debates as well as the original text. It is the latter version we have used.
2 Summary assessments of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats.
3 We will use capitalisation when referring to the circulated document titled 'Review of Core Assumptions' and lower case when referring to the in-production and completed activity.
4 To the working manager, this is the only sensible way of interpreting what 'stakeholder analysis' is about. You need to figure out who the relevant stakeholders are and what they 'can at least live with' in order to write an approvable historiography.
5 It is taken for granted that a key part of the meeting will be taken up with figuring out what exactly (for here and for now) these implicatures are and how they impact on the constructability of sustainable future set out in the plan. We have borrowed the term 'implicature' from Paul Grice (1981).
6 This is accepted as a general policy. Decisions cannot be treated as endlessly revisable. This does not mean, in the midst of the process, managers will not argue strongly that some particular decision ought to be revised or has been inadvertently and wrongly revised.
7 Finding continuity in the midst of radical change is an unsung managerial skill and one of the techniques used to keep the threat of entropy at bay.
8 That is, a network with a central hub and peripheral points.

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