

The Changing Field of Ethical Enquiry Reflections on Current Thinking

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This discussion of what we do as professionals centres on planning ethics. Our code of ethics deal with responsibilities we have to the public, our clients and the various communities within which we work, as well as responsibilities related to the profession and ourselves. We have not always held ethical actions as central to our work. In the 1960s and 1970s, planners discussed planning theory, in the context of what we do that is unique to our profession. Here are some alternative ways we have looked at our profession that may allow us to reflect upon our current practice, taking into account ethics and values of our clients and their surrounding communities.

Central to the discussion of the theory behind our practice was the rational planning model. Using this model, we believe we can objectively formulate goals and objectives and through analysis, identify alternatives. Through careful comparison and systematic evaluation, a preferred solution can be selected and implemented. By appropriate use of the process described in the model, the planner's creativity will serve the public interest.

The basic tenets of the rational planning model were challenged by advocacy planners. These planners felt that the rational planning model was incomplete. Their earliest proponents practised in inner cities, often with disadvantaged communities. Advocacy planners focused on the ends (for example, public housing) sought by decision makers and identified alternative ways of achieving these ends. They developed criteria with which inner-city residents could evaluate and compare alternatives in more humane ways. Differing values could be addressed by visualizing the alternatives as choices to better enable selection of a preferred alternative. With time, other variations on the rational and advocacy planning models emerged to address language, decision making and reflection.

Values are embedded in our words, which if unexamined, lead to results that may not be ideal for the participants involved in the process. For example, Aboriginal communities understand their place in creation and on the land differently from Caucasian communities. Successful planning for the Aboriginal

communities must support these understandings. Successful work within multiple constituencies addresses the ways in which all involved in the planning project use language.

We can make provision for language (and therefore values) of the various parties who make or are affected by decisions by formulating targets for negotiation and creating conditions in which the interests can control the outcome. Our understanding and the process of negotiation drives the design and assessment of our interventions. Throughout the planning process we need to maintain our credibility with these varied interests of all parties by being honest brokers of valuable information.

Creativity involves personal and corporate reflection. When I begin an assignment, I work with the expectations and goals being addressed and relate the circumstances to past experience, comparing and contrasting these together. By drawing upon past experience while making allowances for changed circumstances, a planning approach emerges. I often seek external information from peers or published sources to augment my experience and knowledge. Professional practice involves comparison of unique circumstances with previous examples to make sense of the task and identify alternatives.

People within organizations conceive projects to address their organization's mission and goals. Affected parties may experience these projects differently. Reconciling these differences within the planning process involves corporate reflection. This includes identification of alternatives, structuring the decision-making to enable affected parties and the proponent to share their experiences—good and bad—and negotiating ways in which impacts may be mitigated. Project implementation must honour agreements between proponents and affected parties so they must be completed and done carefully and wisely before project implementation.

Creativity is stimulated by the interactions among clients, affected communities and planners. Creativity occurs during observation, experimentation, evaluation and redirection of effort as the project

unfolds. Planners contribute concepts, theory, analysis, knowledge; perspective, and systematic information-searching procedures to this process. Clients and host communities contribute contextual knowledge within which decisions are made; alternatives, norms and values, priorities, judgment, and operational details. Together, the exchanges between the client and host community, orchestrated by the planner, can lead to a creative and acceptable synergy with a high probability of being successful.

Much has changed since the 1960s and 1970s. The notion of a single definable public interest central to planned action has evolved to one of multiple public interests, some conflicting and indefinite. Does our inability to define what is in the public interest render planning's central activity unimportant? I don't think so. It simply means we need to be more attentive to our practice as a means by which we focus on these multiple public interests. Our current focus on ethical practice is incomplete without reflection on this multifaceted creative activity we engage in as planners.

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