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ANALYZING THE TRANSACTIONAL CONTEXT
FOR PLANNING

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This paper begins with the assumption that successful planning requires careful attention to bureaucratic and political contexts, and presents a framework for assessing those contexts. The key questions considered are: (1) who counts for planning? (2) what is the demand for planning? (3) what is the capability for planning, including staff, technical, and organizational capacity; (4) what are the critical issues surrounding planning; and (5) what environmental conditions are likely to impinge on planning? After reviewing the methods available for answering these questions, the discussion turns to a specific case in which the suggested approach was applied to the analysis of the context for educational planning.

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1.0 Introduction

Experience with development planning over the past two decades leaves at least one clear lesson: the success of planning is contingent on bureaucratic and political contexts. The greatest failures in educational planning have been projects in which foreign donors tried to sell a stock model of rational planning that was largely unrelated to the country's organizational and political realities. A classical case, witnessed by the writer in the field and recently analyzed by Snyder (1978), was the AID/Teachers College effort to install planning in Peru's Ministry of Education. This endeavor failed for many reasons, not the least of which was the marginality of the American advisors to the real games being played in the ministry. The few success stories outside of the socialist world have been cases in which the educational planning function was, in practice, integrated into decision-making about education. Two documented instances are El Salvador (Davis, 1978; McGinn and Warwick, 1978) and Chile (McGinn and Schiefelbein, 1977).

Suppose we agree that planning should be related to its transactional context. How can we appraise a given context--what questions should we ask and how should we go about answering them? And once we have some reliable information, how can we use it to design an effective planning operation? This paper will lay out a set of questions as well as an approach to answering them, and then illustrate both with an actual case of educational planning.

2.0 Key Questions

The assumption behind the following questions is that successful planning is transactional in nature. Its possibilities for affecting decisions will depend not only on the technical quality of a plan or of the information for

planning, but on a range of dealings between planners and key actors in their environments. Elsewhere (Warwick, 1978) the author has set forth a conceptual framework showing some critical interactions among plan formulation, plan implementation, and the planning environment. The essential message is that, whether to be understood or to be done, planning must be set in the context of national history and culture, bureaucratic politics, and other environmental forces. The overarching questions are who and what will make a difference for planning. More specifically, the analyst would want to begin by answering five questions:

2.0.1 Who counts for planning? The most basic question is who does or can make a difference for the particular piece of planning in question. Obvious candidates for educational planning are national authorities, such as the chief executive, the Minister of Education, or the Minister of Finance; rivals and allies in the Ministry of Education and other concerned agencies; interest groups, such as teachers' unions, university student organizations, and political parties; international donors, who may be funding parts of the activity under discussion; and potential implementers, especially teachers and school administrators. The challenge is not to find everyone who might conceivably have something to do with developing or executing a plan, but to identify those actors who will be most crucial for planning and implementation.

In trying to assess the context for planning in El Salvador's Ministry of Education, Russell Davis (1978)* quickly saw that the most significant figures

*All subsequent references to Davis's experience in El Salvador will be based on this source.

for his purposes were the minister, who was reputed to be a "hard sell" on planning; the director of school construction (COPLACE), who was the chief advocate of more structured planning, and the AID Education Advisor who had issued the invitation and who also hoped for a planning office of some kind. As he became better acquainted with the ministry scene, Davis identified others with obvious influence on the chances for planning, such as the director of primary education, and still others who were influential behind the scenes. The most notable among these was the UNESCO advisor to the ministry, who was called the eminence gris in El Salvador's educational reform. By pursuing this question of "who counts", the analyst can obtain a reasonably clear, and often nuanced, picture of the individuals and organizational units whose views should be taken into account in planning.

2.0.2. What is the demand for planning? This question is related to the last, but is more specific. The analyst will want to ask not only who counts in general, but which are the specific individuals and agencies wanting planning to be done and interested in using the results. Sometimes those who count do not want planning, while those who want planning do not count. The prospects for planning impact will usually be dim if its main proponents are technocrats, academics, and donor representatives with no power of decision-making, while the real decision-makers are simply not interested. The question of demand has three sub-parts:

a. Who wants planning? Since, at the level of reflexive responses, most administrators will say that they are in favor of planning, the analyst will want to probe into the depth of interest. It would be helpful to prepare a short list ranking those expressing an interest according to (a) their power or influence in decision-making; (b) the seriousness of their concern; and

(c) the chances that solid planning will make a difference for their decision-making. The ideal situation for planning is one in which decision-makers are seriously interested and are in a position to be influenced by the results of planning. In El Salvador Davis found at the beginning of his visit that the strongest advocate of planning was the director of the school construction agency. Both men then tried to convince the minister of the need for more systematic planning, and eventually succeeded. In the next administration the level of demand rose higher as the planning office performed services considered valuable by a broader constituency in the Ministry of Education.

b. What kind of planning do they want? "Planning" is a rubric covering a multitude of virtues. For some it means nothing more than solid information on what is happening, while others define it as the programming and coordination of tasks across several organizational units. Some careful probing into the interests and intentions of potential consumers will help to clarify the de facto market for planning. After a series of exchanges in the Ministry of Education, Davis came away with a reasonably clear idea of what key officials did and did not want. In addition to an interest in various kinds of studies, he found support for planning as a ministry-wide activity. His report was eventually used as the basis for organizing a new planning office, one whose divisions corresponded to specific interests expressed during the earlier meetings. As we will see in a later case, however, one must be cautious about accepting certain statements, such as "this ministry needs greater coordination," as evidence of support for a more active planning unit.

c. Is demand likely to change? In fairly turbulent or dynamic situations the analyst will want to ask if there are conditions which will significantly

change the demand for planning, upward or downward. While political and economic forecasting are notoriously fallible arts, it is possible to make some informed estimates. If, for example, a country is about to undergo rapid industrialization financed by substantial oil revenues, and if projections indicate that the new industries will require large numbers of skilled workers, it is not unreasonable to expect that this situation will increase the demand for manpower planning. Where, on the other hand, a government has recently had a disastrous experience with planning, to the point where the very word leaves a bad taste, chances are good that demand for that kind of planning will subside.

2.0.3. What is the capability for planning? Government planning organizations vary widely in their overall capability for this task. In assessing capability, the analyst must consider three more specific questions:

a. What is the staff capacity for planning? How well trained is the planning staff in the techniques of planning and in the data collection and analysis methods supportive of planning? Here a distinction can be made between actual and potential capacity. A planning unit may have low actual capacity, but a very able and motivated staff whose capabilities could be raised fairly quickly through concentrated training efforts. A related question is whether there are competent specialists who could be brought in from other agencies or elsewhere in the country to increase capacity. In his explorations in El Salvador, Davis found that "a strong and capable man was in the Department of Statistics, seconded from the National Office of Census and Statistics, and at work gathering and marshalling basic system data (1978, p.14)." He later suggested that this man be brought into the

new planning unit to provide immediate strength in a vital area.

b. What is the technical capacity for analysis? What technical resources, such as data-processing equipment or access to computers, does the planning unit have to conduct its analytic work? And what is the staff competence to make use of these resources? It obviously makes little sense to propose a planning operation requiring large-scale computations and sophisticated statistics if the planning unit does all of its data-processing by hand, and the staff would not know how to use a counter-sorter, much less a computer, if it were given to them.

c. What is the organizational capacity for planning? Organizational capacity has two parts: internal and external. The central question about internal capacity is whether the planning unit is able to make effective use of its own human resources. What, for example, is the quality of leadership? of coordination among the unit's various divisions? of staff motivation and professionalism? Is the planning staff able to work together as a team, or are there crippling conflicts, tensions, and frictions? These and other standard questions about organizational effectiveness are highly germane in assessing the possibilities for effective planning. The most critical question, about external capacity, concerns the planning unit's ability to work with key individuals and organizations elsewhere. In educational planning the pivotal external relationships are typically with other departments in the Ministry of Education, especially primary and secondary education. The national planning organization may also be vital to the success of educational planning, particularly if it has the final say on budgetary questions. The astute analyst will thus want to look for signs of bureaucratic rivalries, jurisdictional battles, or other conflicts which can affect the process or final impact of planning.

:2.0.4 What are the critical issues surrounding planning? Contextual analysis must also pay close attention to the points of controversy, discussion, or focus that will affect the perception of planning. Specifically, how will critical issues in the society or in the government shape perceptions about the processes, the contents, or the auspices of planning? Some issues will be energizing in that they spark interest in or mobilize support for planning. In El Salvador the issue of "continuing the educational reforms into the next government" was a positive force for systematic planning (McGinn and Warwick, 1978). Other issues will be debilitating for they will almost automatically weaken or contaminate the planning questions with which they become associated. Davis reports that the Minister of Education in El Salvador was adamantly opposed to evaluation and social science research on education, and rejected such language as "baseline and post measures." Because of an unpleasant experience with another advisor who had tried to cram manpower planning down his throat, he was also sensitive on that subject. Davis implies that if he had tried to structure his recommendations on planning around those two issues, his report would have been dead on delivery. Instead he proposed models dealing with issues of positive concern to the minister and his confreres while avoiding any of the red flags suggested by his inquiries. Finally, there is often a category of issues that can be called burning but unpredictable in their implications for planning. In Malaysia the question of ethnic balance between the Malays and the Chinese is perhaps the central political issue, and one which vitally affects many spheres of planning. But whether it would work for or against educational planning would depend on the specific issue involved and on the gestalt presented by the entire planning operation.

In some cases the heat supplied by this issue could move planning across many of the usual hurdles encountered, while in others it could make the entire operation evaporate.

2.0.5 What environmental conditions are likely to impinge on planning?

In appraising the environment for planning, as well as for plan implementation, the analyst should consider the implications of several sets of circumstances. Foremost among these is environmental threat, or the perception of impending danger. Countries faced with the prospect of war with other nations or of civil insurrections within their own borders may be ill-disposed toward long-range planning. Key officials, such as the president and the most powerful ministers, may be so taken up with security issues that they simply have no time for planning. The same situation could arise as a result of political or economic uncertainty. Standing on the brink of economic chaos, with IMF rescuers on their back and sides, political officials may regard educational planning as irrelevant for the duration of the crisis. At the opposite extreme, a totally placid and predictable environment may generate such feelings of tranquility that the government senses no urgent need for planning. Apart from the fabled Pacific isles, whose serenity may be more apparent than real, such situations are rare.

To conclude this exercise the analyst might draw up a balance sheet showing the major forces working for and against this piece of planning. Among the actors who "count", which ones are for, against, undecided but probably for, and undecided but probably negative? Overall, is the contemplated planning likely to generate more support than opposition from the issue context, or vice versa? Is there enough demand for this kind of planning by the right people and organizations? Does the planning unit have the staff, technical, and organizational capacity to meet this demand? Is the overall state of the

environment, including threat and uncertainty, more likely to work for or against the planning? On balance, is the situation ripe for this planning or not?

3.0 Gathering the Necessary Information

How does one go about answering these questions? Who should collect the information, and by what methods? The questions are by their very nature delicate, for they go to the deep structure rather than the surface of organizational life. Resistance to probing will sometimes be strong, and the chances of controversy high. Further, to obtain an accurate perspective on personalities, issues, and organizational relations, it is usually necessary to go to the top of the various bureaucracies--to the ministers, the directors general, and the department heads. For all of these reasons information gathering should be assigned to persons with considerable experience in organizational research or consulting. This is not the place for neophytes.

Interestingly, this is one area where the foreign advisor or other outside consultants often have a comparative advantage. Very rarely can a staff member of a planning organization go around the ministry to find out how that organization is perceived, to uncover latent conflicts and rivalries between departments, and ask other sensitive questions about the climate for planning. Such efforts would be seen at best as prying and at worst as spying. Members of the planning unit would be in an equally poor position to assess and report on the leadership dynamics, coordination problems, staff capacities and internal rivalries of their own organization. Outsiders will frequently be in a better position to gather this information, provided that they have

adequate legitimation to undertake this process, know what they are doing, and do not themselves become an issue in the power struggles they are studying. The work of Russell Davis in El Salvador, of Warwick, and Noel McGinn also in El Salvador, and, of Warwick in the U.S. Department of State, the Agency for International Development, and various public organizations in Indonesia all attest to the possibilities for data-gathering by outsiders. There are probably also many counter-examples, but these are rarely reported in any detail, for obvious reasons.

What sources of information can be used to analyze the context for planning? One source that is not appropriate is any kind of structured survey, particularly one involving a questionnaire to be filled out by senior officials. Ministers, department heads, and others at their level generally find it insulting as well as tedious to complete questionnaires. A structured form gives the impression that the interviewer is not there to talk about problems as seen and defined by the official, but to gather "data" in prearranged categories. Busy executives may tolerate and even enjoy the questioning outsider who can engage in intelligent conversation about problems and issues, but they typically have no patience for the programmed reader of questions.

The best strategy for assessing a planning context is to draw on multiple sources of information, but with a bias toward the qualitative. What one must do, in essence, is to sketch out a preliminary picture of the situation, test it against other sources of information, revise it, and continue the process until either the picture does not change with added information or the information sources run dry. The following will usually be the most fruitful sources of insights:

3.1 Unstructured or semi-structured interviews with key figures. If at all possible the analyst should arrange to conduct personal interviews with those officials who do or will count most for the success of a planning operation. The person arranging the consultation, such as the director of the planning organization, will usually be in a good position to indicate who should be interviewed. Once the interviews are underway other names may come up. These may include various "gatekeepers" in the government--officials who have no formal responsibility for planning, but whose clearance, concurrence, or cooperation will be necessary for a plan to take effect.

While there is almost no situation in which a highly structured questionnaire would be appropriate, the degree of structure to the interviews will depend on the topics to be covered, the skill of the interviewer(s), the sophistication and interest of the respondent, the degree of fear or suspicion aroused by the interview, and similar circumstances. In every case the interviewer should have a fairly clear notion of what, in general, he or she would like to learn from the interview, but leave ample room for the unexpected. Very often the most useful approach is to ask the respondent two or three general questions, and then let the conversation flow naturally until the more specific points have been covered. In his initial study of the context for planning in El Salvador, Davis began with a single broad question which produced its desired effect:

In explaining the purpose of his visit to each office director, the Advisor (Davis) stated that he was not necessarily an advocate of formal planning, nor did a formal organization of planning have to be concentrated in a single office. The advisor was certain that a good deal of planning was already going on in the Ministry, and he wished to hear about it, before recommending any changes. This was usually sufficient to stimulate the office head to talk.

For the first fifteen minutes of the interview the advisor took no notes, but for the final thirty minutes, notes were taken, because, as the advisor explained, the material was "simply too rich to rely on unaided memory" (1978, pp. 12-13).

Where the respondent is sympathetic, well-informed, and interested in contextual analysis, it might be worthwhile to provide a few broad questions in advance of the interview. The writer followed this strategy in interviewing Alberto Zuñiga, then Under Secretary of Education in El Salvador, about the experience of ODEPOR from its founding until 1977. Zuñiga had not only been ODEPOR's first director, but also had a strong professional interest in organizational development and organizational politics. Aware of this interest, the author prepared a page of questions covering the pre-history, founding, growth, difficulties, and current status of ODEPOR. From all indications Zuñiga had studied these questions and found them helpful in refreshing his memory. The interview itself followed the general sequence suggested by the questions, but proceeded more as a semi-structured conversation than as a typical survey interview. A similar strategy was followed in an interview with one of the key officials in ODEPOR. This individual, who was also very much interested in our organizational analysis, not only studied the questions but prepared typed answers which he used for his replies. This discussion proved to be more structured than that with Zuñiga, but still open to the give-and-take of informal conversation.

3.2 Discussions and reactions in meetings. Contextual analysis will often begin with interviews of the sort described, and then proceed to a preliminary report which is discussed with one's immediate clients or others in the

organization. Reactions to these initial presentations and other discussions in the meetings are themselves an excellent source of insights into the transactional context for planning. Presented with information on their own organization, or with tentative proposals for change, even officials who were reticent in the interviews may well come forth with suggestions or criticisms, if only in self-defense. In a study of reorganization in the U.S. Department of State, the author (Warwick, 1975) found it most helpful to have data feedback sessions with the executives who had supplied the information. In two instances these were conducted with the assistance of experts in group process from the National Training Laboratories in Group Development (NTL). Interestingly, a summary of the findings from the entire group of respondents not only prompted comments of confirmation or disconfirmation, but in some cases new observations on the advantages and disadvantages of the reorganization. The process consultants played a useful role in surfacing vaguely articulated feelings about the changes, especially criticisms about the problems caused for the managers and their programs.

In studying the possibilities for educational planning in El Salvador, Davis also obtained valuable insights from several rounds of meetings with senior officials. At one point, in response to obvious interest by the group, he outlined a possible model of planning in the Ministry.

Having outlined the model, and concerned about its limitations and overly technocratic basis, the advisor began to point out flaws in the model, but he was stopped by the questions and the obvious interest the model stimulated among the participants. This was precisely what they had expected and apparently wanted of the advisor. Could he amplify the model and the discussion, put it on paper and discuss it at a second session (1978, p. 18)?

In the second exchange the group considered various organizational models for planning, and then moved on to discuss studies that would be important in that process. Discussions of models and studies continued in a third session. Sometime during this meeting the idea arose that planning should be organized as a Ministry-wide committee with a technical secretariat. This was the key organizational proposal in Davis's final report, and one that flowed from the give-and-take of these exchanges. These examples suggest that highly significant information on the context for planning, as well as ideas for changing that context, can arise from group interactions and especially dialogue over specific proposals. Such proposals often serve as an intervention which almost forces an interested group to think in very concrete terms about the fit between planning innovations and organizational context.

3.3 Informal observation. The analyst can also learn a great deal about the planning context simply by observing what does and does not take place in the organization, such as the Ministry of Education. In the case to be discussed the advisors had the great advantage of simultaneously providing technical assistance on data analysis and appraising the possibilities for expanding educational planning. Thus it was possible to observe what the existing planning staff actually did, how they related to each other, how well they were trained, and so on. Where there is no formal planning unit it is still possible to observe the activities and patterns of interaction in the interested units. The following questions might be helpful guides for informal observations:

a. What does the planning staff do? Whatever their nominal responsibilities and titles, on what do they really spend their time? Do the

planners actually plan, or is most of their time taken up with data collection and analysis?

b. What is the apparent level of staff capacity? What is their level of formal training in different areas, such as statistics, planning methodologies, and programming? What is the fit between staff capacities and the activities that they actually perform? In some situations the staff may be quite well trained, but underutilized because of the low level of activities performed in the name of planning. In others they may have little formal training, but be performing at a fairly high level as a result of good on-the-job learning.

c. What is the relationship between the staff and the director? How frequent are the interactions? Does the director regularly approach the staff for consultations, or are the majority of the contacts initiated by the staff? How are relationships--easy, stiff, warm, cold, collegial, paternalistic? Do the staff members show confidence in their dealings with the director, or do they seem easily intimidated, sycophantic, or ill-at-ease?

d. What are the relationships between the different parts of the organization? How frequent are the contacts between the different sections of the planning unit? Are these contacts easy and informal, or more bureaucratic in tone? Do the division chiefs or equivalents enter easily into interactions with each other, or do they feel obligated to make such contacts through the director or some other higher official?

e. How frequent and cordial are the relationships between this unit and others in the same Ministry? Do the staff members of the planning organization deal mainly with others in their own unit, or do they have

regular contacts with other units? How are such contacts initiated--are individuals, such as division chiefs, free to approach officials in other units, or must such contacts be mediated through the director's office? How cordial are the relationships with other units? What are the issues or areas on which they come into contact? Are there any specific examples of collaboration between the planning unit and others in the Ministry or elsewhere? Are there any examples of conflicts or frictions? Answers to these and similar questions will be extremely important in assessing the planning unit's capacity to relate to other organizations in the event that planning is expanded.

3.4 Studying documents prepared by or about the planning unit. Finally, the analyst will find it helpful to examine two kinds of documents: those prepared by the planning unit or by its subdivisions; and those prepared by others about the planning unit. In some cases it will be evident that the planning unit, whatever its mandate and pretensions, simply has no product. This fact will itself be very revealing and deserving of careful study. In other cases the planning unit may have a superabundance of reports, statistical profiles, and other kinds of "output", but all of very low quality. Where the straw content is high, the analyst will want to inquire about the reasons--is it because of low capacity to do better work, an ingrained preference for quantity over quality, a leadership with no control over, or interest in, the quality of work done, or some other reason?

In some countries there will also be reports available about the planning unit. Some of these may be found in the planning organization itself, but others will be on file at one or more of the local donor agencies or at

their headquarters. Since donors often rely on planning units as a pivotal source of information and, sometimes, of coordination for international aid, they are typically interested in the quantity and quality of the work produced by these planning units. If there are no formal reports, knowledgeable advisors, past or present, might be contacted for their informal assessments of the environment for planning.

In short, without a great deal of fanfare, and sometimes by doing nothing more than keeping one's eyes open, the analyst can assemble a variety of qualitative information about the performance and potential of a planning organization. The interpretation of such fragmentary information will necessarily be judgmental, but this does not mean that it is invalid. Sharing preliminary interpretations with informed persons inside and outside the planning unit can often lead to a more refined analysis or at least to the removal of egregious errors of interpretation.

4.0 The Case of Agraria

The previous suggestions for contextual analysis were, in fact, applied by the author and Advisor F . in a country to be identified as Agraria.*

*Because of the transactional sensitivities to be described, anonymity for the country is in order. Some of the identifying information will be changed for the same reason. The material on the advisory relationship and the observations on the planning unit have not been changed.

This is a small and fairly isolated developing nation whose economy is based mainly in agriculture. In 1977 Harvard University's Graduate School of Education was invited by the Agency for International Development (AID) to supply technical assistance to the government's educational planning unit, located in the Ministry of Education. While the mandate for assistance was not precise, the planning unit was interested in improving its capacity for data analysis and, more generally, in expanding and improving its planning activities. At that point the writer had just completed a paper outlining a framework for analyzing the transactional context of educational planning (1977). Given the broader interest of the planning unit in developing a more active role within the Ministry, we thought it would be useful to apply this framework. Thus in preparation for the first visit to Agraria the writer translated the conceptual material into a brief list of questions and observational dimensions not unlike those indicated earlier.

AID was interested in helping the planning unit for two reasons. First, the mission's Education Advisor was in the process of negotiating a multi-million dollar education loan to the government. While planning was not the central focus of the loan, the Advisor felt that a stronger planning unit would be crucial for monitoring progress in the various substantive areas receiving assistance. This unit would probably be the only source of statistical data about the total impact of the loan on such areas as enrollment and retention. Second, apart from the benefits for the contemplated loan, the Advisor and the USAID Mission considered modest assistance to the planning unit worthwhile in any event. The planning director had approached the Advisor with a request for aid on data analysis, and seemed sincerely interested in improving the unit's skills in this area. When the Advisor

learned of Harvard's Analysis Methodologies Project with AID, he requested assistance from the project and agreed to put up local funds to cover some of the costs. Under the resulting agreement Harvard staff and consultants were to visit Agraria several times to strengthen its capacity in statistical analysis and otherwise improve its capabilities in educational planning. Here and throughout the project the Advisor respected the judgement of the Harvard staff about what needed to be done, and wanted mainly to be informed about the progress made during each visit. Relationships with the Advisor and the mission were very cordial, and there were no problems whatsoever stemming from excessive AID enthusiasm or interference.

On the first visit the author and Advisor F met with the director of the planning unit to discuss precisely what would be done over the coming months. The main topic of discussion was how to strengthen the unit's capability for handling and reporting educational statistics. The director had a specific plan in this regard, one discussed earlier with the AID Education Advisor. Since Ministry personnel worked only until around noon, key staff members could be brought back in the afternoons for training and additional work on analysis. But for this to happen the staff involved would have to be paid overtime from AID funds. We thought this was a sensible way to proceed, and the AID Education Advisor agreed to supply the funds as part of the agreement with Harvard.

During this discussion we also broached the subject of the context for planning activities in the Ministry of Education. We pointed out that if the planning unit was to expand its activities or significantly change its relationships with other parts of the Ministry it would be helpful to know

more about the present situation. We cited some recent research on the relationships between the planning unit and other departments in El Salvador's Ministry of Education to illustrate the relevance of this approach. The director agreed with the principle we were suggesting, but clearly seemed nervous about the topic. Even at that early point the question of relationships with other units seemed very delicate, and one that the director did not want to discuss in any depth. Nevertheless, he agreed that it would be useful for us to interview some of the other directors and administrators, if only to obtain a better idea of their needs and interests in planning. He then instructed his staff to take charge of arranging the interviews.

On the surface, the interviewing process was straightforward. The staff arranged the appointments without apparent incident, and we went to the respondent's office for the interview. In each case we explained that we were working with the planning unit and were trying to learn how it might provide better service to other departments and to the Ministry as a whole. While maintaining a conversational style and allowing the discussion to move in its own directions, we did try to cover the following questions in every interview:

- 1) What are the main activities of this department?
- 2) What are this unit's relationships with the planning department-- how often and on what are you in contact?
- 3) What kinds of data are most needed or would be of most help to this department?

The directors interviewed were always correct, and some were cordial, but we

had the sense that we were treading on sensitive terrain. Compared to similar interviews conducted in El Salvador, the first few discussions seemed rather formalistic and sometimes plainly superficial. A few warmed up when they discussed vexing problems faced by their own departments, such as a lack of coordination in the sales of textbooks, but comments about the planning department and its director seemed guarded. Finally one of the directors, an individual whose experience was outrun only by his frustrations with the system, opened up with a very frank portrayal of the relations between planning and the other departments. The gist of his observations was later confirmed by the planning director, who had hesitated to inform us of the situation at the first meeting. The main points will be summarized shortly.

At the same time the Harvard advisors began working directly with the planning staff on data analysis. The author and Advisor F were joined in this effort by Advisor E, an expert on educational planning with great experience in data collection and analysis. Advisors E and F undertook a training program which extended over several months and produced very tangible results. Their strategy was to work shoulder-to-shoulder with key persons in the planning department on actual tasks of data analysis. Because the planning unit had no mechanical data processing equipment, much less a computer, all tabulations had to be done by hand. The advisors decided that the best course was to show the planning staff what could be done even with hand tabulations, and to involve them in doing all of the work necessary for a professional-level report on certain measures of educational performance. Through these interactions Advisors E and F formed some very clear impressions about the capacities and aspirations of the planning staff, and about the overall

organization of the planning department. Over meals and in the evenings, they and the author exchanged impressions, and tried to relate them to the practical question of what could be done to improve the planning department. The blend of information from interviews outside the department with observations based on first-hand experience with the planning staff was particularly helpful in stimulating thought about constructive changes.

On this and a second visit the writer and Advisor F also carried out interviews, as distinct from working conversations, with the division chiefs of the planning unit. These, too, shed considerable light on what was and was not being done in the department, on difficulties in relationships with the rest of the Ministry, on the leadership style of the director, and on the general level of staff capacity and morale. At the same time we were able to read the various reports published by the planning unit, and in some cases to discuss them with the staff. One such report was particularly revealing, for it dealt with organizational matters outside the planning department. This seems to have been too delicate for release, and so was shelved within the department. This mixture of interviews, informal conversations, observations, and reading provided the basis for the picture to be presented.

4.1 The Ministry Context

The Ministry of Education is a highly traditional bureaucracy organized on a vertical basis with little communication or coordination among departments.*

*For simplicity the discussion will be put in the present tense. While the observations reported appeared to be accurate until mid-1978, the situation may have changed somewhat since that time.

The Minister, an older man who has been in that office for many years, shows slight interest in organized educational planning or innovation. His managerial style emphasizes one-to-one contacts with the various directors together with central coordination in his office. He does not call meetings of all directors-- according to one estimate there were only four such meetings in nine years-- and does not want others to convene the directors. One respondent commented:

He works with each of the directors separately--one to one.

From all indications the Minister is opposed to the idea of group discussions and reviewing issues on rational/technical grounds, for such procedures might close off some of his own options. By dealing with each director in the privacy of his own office he can introduce personal or political considerations into the negotiations that might be foreclosed by open meetings. The result, according to the director quoted, is a policy of "divide and rule."

The relationships among the various departments are marked by isolation and envious vigilance. Apart from the sporadic and minimal guidance provided by the Minister, there is no organized mechanism of coordination. Each unit carries out its work more or less alone. The result, as one director put it, is that "I am the President of (function)." Another director commented: "There are general objectives that we share, but we each go our own way." While the paramount source of insularity is the organizational culture of the Ministry, communication is not helped by the geographic dispersion of the various units. With no single building to house the ministry, the various offices are scattered across the city.

But the isolation is not complete. Some of the directors are highly

vigilant of what others are doing, and do not take kindly to those who move ahead of the crowd. A case in point is the Curriculum Department. Several years ago, with the assistance of a foreign donor, this unit was able to expand its staff and generally increase its visibility within the Ministry. As its volume of work rose, however, so did the envy of other directors. As a result, when the new curriculum was finally introduced, it met with a less than cordial reception from the departments that were to use it. Part of the reason was its departure from traditional teaching methods, but bureaucratic jealousy was also at work. The attitude seemed to be that the Curriculum Department had its moment of glory, and now should be brought back to earth by its sister units. As one commentator put it, "The curriculum group grew very fast. The expectation in the Ministry is that you should go slow."

The director of the planning unit experienced an even more immediate backlash against managerial activism. Concerned about an issue which cut across several departments, he once tried to call a meeting of all the directors to discuss it. When the meeting was announced, some of the other directors complained to the Minister, who asked the planning chief to be careful about gatherings of this kind. The reason had little to do with the contents of the meeting, but rather with the fact that there was a meeting at all. The director's watchful peers apparently saw this initiative as a thinly-veiled attempt to gain unfair influence in the Ministry. He reacted by calling no more meetings of the directors.

Between the Minister and the departments is the Director General. Despite his prominent position on the Ministry's organization chart, his precise role

seemed obscure but largely technical. From what we could determine, if a director had a question about the substance of a program, such as primary education, he or she would go to the Minister for its resolution. If the question was largely of a technical nature and did not involve significant policy issues, it would be taken up with the Director General. Overall this individual did not appear to be a powerful figure in the Ministry, either by position or personal preference. One respondent observed that "he fulfills some planning function because the planning office isn't doing its job completely."

Overall, the Ministry of Education seemed to be an agency which placed a very high value on bureaucratic conformity and a low value on change. After a long term in office the Minister seemed anxious to keep matters on familiar terrain and under his personal control. The Ministry showed no signs of a strong impulse to produce a rapid expansion of education, to improve the quality of instruction, to implement the new curriculum across the country, or to introduce any other marked change in education or its own operating procedures.

We also had the distinct impression that the steady-state quality of the Ministry was related to the larger political environment of Agraria. The government was repressive and known to be mortally afraid of the armed insurrection and violence seen in neighboring countries. One director stated explicitly that education is not given much emphasis for fear that it may raise political consciousness and thereby cause trouble. The government, he noted, seems afraid of education in general and of university education in

particular. Educational innovation, then, may stir the same concerns that are generated by all innovations--a fear that the country's safe streets and political stability will give way to social chaos and guerilla warfare. The total political context thus seemed inseparable from the immediate ministerial context for educational planning.

4.2 The Planning Department

The planning department was established in the late 1960's with the aim of gathering and summarizing basic data on the educational system. The founding director now heads another large department in the Ministry, while the current director has held that post since the early 1970's.

The most notable impression left by the planning department is that it does little planning. It did help to draft the present 10-year plan for education, but that was a one-time exercise which is now outdated. Currently each unit either does its own planning or stumbles along without planning, and comes into contact with the planning department mainly in the latter's capacity as coordinator of the annual budget. The Department of Primary Education, for example, has its own planning unit and makes its own decisions about where to build or approve new schools. The Department of Construction also works with essentially no guidance from planning, although it does coordinate its activities with the departments of primary and secondary education. In no case that we could find does the planning unit actually plan, as distinct from react to, the activities and expenditures of other departments.

Nor is the planning department a locus of coordination in the Ministry. The directors stated unequivocally that there is no coordination, in general, and none provided by the planning department. One was quite forthright on this point:

They don't help me in my work. They work within their own four walls. What came out--the 10-Year Plan--was basically written within their four walls by four persons. What happens? We have to read the document to see what is the Ministry's policy. . . . We really have very limited contacts with them. . . . There is no control in the Ministry--nobody knows what the others are doing.

Others stated:

--Planning is supposed to advise us, but until now there has been no contact.

--They have done a series of studies, but our main contacts are in preparing the budget.

--We have practically no contact with planning. . . . There is a development plan, but we are not following it.

The planning department is, in short, a technical-statistical rather than a planning and coordinating unit in the Ministry. As already noted, on the one occasion when the director did try to play a coordinating role, the effort was smothered by personal and bureaucratic rivalries.

The planning department does perform one vital function in the Ministry, that of budget coordination. Under the present system, which has been in operation for two and one half years, the department receives general guidelines from the Ministry of Finance, such as a 10 percent minimum increase in the budget for each operating unit. It then communicates this information to the other departments together with a request for their draft budgets. The departments, in turn, prepare statements of their financial needs and return them to the planning unit. If any given line exceeds the guidelines

established by Finance, the department must submit a justification. Planning then reviews the departmental submissions, particularly those items that are above the minimal figure or otherwise unusual. If, for example, the Department of Secondary Education requests a substantial increase in the number of schools or teachers for a certain geographic area, the planning staff will consult their own projections on growth for the area. Should the request appear justified, they will support it in their final presentation to Finance. If it does not, they may, often after consulting the department, lower the figure requested. The planning department's role in this process is largely reactive--it responds to the initiatives of the departments rather than makes proposals to them. Nevertheless this function does give planning some influence over the de facto priorities of the Ministry. To judge from the absence of complaints during our interviews with the department heads, planning has carried out this assignment without causing major heartburn.

4.2.1 Internal Structure

The planning department itself has a director and five operating units, each headed by a chief or coordinator. The director is unquestionably the central figure in the organization. All eyes are on his door, and no one steps very far without consulting him. The director's leadership style is similar to that of the Ministry as a whole--top-down and one-to-one. His own attention is heavily centered on the office of the Minister, which he visits regularly. Given the upward focus of his attention, he seems little interested in group discussions, organizational planning, or joint decision-making with the heads of the five divisions. He does, however, place considerable confidence in the head of the programming control unit, who serves as the unofficial second-in-command. The other unit heads seem to have little regular contact with the director.

The following is a brief characterization of the five divisions:

- 1) Programming Control. This is the most powerful of the five. Its main task is to handle the budget review outlined earlier, and its chief seems quietly capable.
- 2) Educational Statistics. Measured by staff size, this is the largest division and one that is crucial to the work of the planning department. Its main responsibility is to collect the semi-annual report forms prepared by each school in the country, and then to tabulate the information they contain. The division is headed by a quiet, able person with some background in statistics and research methodology.
- 3) Information. The information unit, consisting of a coordinator and an assistant, handles requests for information from within the Ministry of Education and from other sources. It is a service operation with a secondary role in the work of the planning department.
- 4) Research and Evaluation. This unit is responsible for research going beyond the administrative data collected by the statistics section. It has a staff of five, with three in research proper and two in documentation. Although it has undertaken several studies on significant questions of education, it, too, would fall into second echelon of significance.
- 5) Organizational Studies. This is another two-person unit whose assigned mission is to analyze organizational problems and to suggest more efficient ways of conducting the Ministry's business. To date it seems to have accomplished little and is virtually disregarded within the planning department.

Overall the division chiefs and the rest of the staff seem timid and limited in their planning perspectives. The chiefs of the programming control

and of Educational Statistics units are the most promising as well as influential persons under the director. The head of the research and evaluation unit seems competent but not well trained in research methodology and unfocused in choosing projects. The head of the Organizational Studies division also lacks focus, and seems frustrated by the director's lack of interest in that sphere of work. The rest of the staff seem to be mainly clerical employees with no sense of professionalism and little intrinsic interest in their work. While we were there (and there is no reason to believe that this period was unrepresentative of the office as a whole) seemed to lack dynamism and to accomplish little given the size of its staff. Compared to the planning office in El Salvador, the activity level, the motivation of the staff, and the quantity and quality of the work produced were all lower. Desktops were empty and the staff did not seem driven to meet deadlines. The general picture was one of animation at the top, somnolence at the bottom, and some signs of life in the middle.

4.3 Suggestions for Improvement

Our interviews and observations suggested several areas in which the work of the planning department could be improved. Some of these possibilities were raised by the directors of other departments, some by the staff of the planning unit, and some by both. The areas mentioned fall under two broad headings: planning and coordination; and statistical data.

4.3.1 Planning and Coordination

The interviews revealed a strong sense among other directors that the

planning unit should play a more active role in planning and coordinating the work of the various departments. At the same time there was obvious ambivalence about the notion that the planning director, or any other director, should move ahead of his confreres.

Planning. The consensus was that there is no real educational planning in Agraria. The 10-Year Plan may be a useful source of guidelines, but most directors regard it as overly general and outdated. Despite this realization, only three directors suggested specifically that the planning unit step in to fill the vacuum:

--We should have a mechanism for developing very concrete operating plans. . . . planning has to tell me: (1) the country's needs; and (2) a policy for dealing with these needs. Then they could suggest that we develop such and such possibilities.

--I don't think (the planning department) has fulfilled what it can do. It needs to provide the direction of the planning of the ministry. . . . We present our annual plans in the budget, but it is hard to do when you don't know what is going on in other parts of the Ministry.

--We need assistance from them; they are the brain of the whole system. . . . To do our plan for next year we need guidance from planning on what to do.

Although there was some sentiment in favor of a more active planning operation, our sense was that a sudden shift toward planning activism would be too drastic and ultimately counterproductive. Until the Minister and the other directors become accustomed to more limited forms of interdepartmental collaboration, they will not be prepared for forceful leadership by the planning unit. It is also doubtful that the planning department has the statistical base and the staff capacity for such planning.

Coordination. Most of the directors voiced the hope that the planning department would take a more active stance in promoting coordination within the Ministry. Some spoke of coordination in the minimal sense of better information-sharing, while others advocated positive efforts, such as meetings of directors, to ensure that each department knows what the others are doing. These comments were typical:

- The problem of the system is not with data. . . .they (planning) need to be more dynamic in coordinating the activities of the various departments.
- We all have access to the minister, but what we need is some coordination at a lower level. I can go and talk with the minister about my problems, but we seldom have a meeting all together. We have asked for and had a few meetings with the Director General and they have been very successful, with people laying out their needs and problems. Sometimes we've seen that three or more were doing the same thing. That's the way I like to work (with everyone knowing what's going on).
- There should be a means by which all the heads of the departments can make a regular evaluation of the educational system. Now we do that in parallel, never sharing with each other what we are doing. All the different departments of the ministry affect each other in their work, but we don't communicate well with each other.
- We are in contact (with planning), but this should be constant. We need to know what other departments are doing, and there should be more coordination.

When asked about his relations with the planning department, another director remarked: "The main problem is information--we don't know what they are doing. We find out, then ask them for reports." He suggested that the planning unit should be the channel for all information in the Ministry, collecting it from outside and inside and sending it around to all the departments. Interestingly, in these comments on coordination only one of the directors

alluded to the difficulties experienced when the planning director had practiced what they were preaching. Here, as elsewhere, there is a chasm between the gilded ideal of coordination and the gritty reality of its implementation.

4.3.2 Statistical Data

The majority of the suggestions coming from our discussions in the Ministry had to do with the statistical data collected and published by the planning department. Most of these data are drawn from questionnaires sent twice each year to all primary and secondary schools in the country. The forms are distributed by and returned to the field supervisors working under the departments of primary and secondary education. The following were the main difficulties reported with the present information system.

1) Design of the questionnaire. Several officials who work directly with the forms thought that they collected information which was not useful and failed to include certain questions of basic importance for planning and administration. Some also felt that the questionnaires, particularly those for the primary schools, were outdated. The form for the primary level had not changed in ten years, despite an attempt by the planning department to come up with a revision. This effort was discontinued for lack of funds and staff time. The existing forms gather no information on student transfers to other schools nor on the physical plant and equipment of the school buildings. Moreover, the instructions for providing the information are inadequate.

2) Speed. The greatest complaint both within and outside the planning department is that the statistical data are not processed in time to be useful. There are two major sources of delay: tardiness in returning the forms to

the Ministry, and slowness in processing the data within the Ministry. The questionnaires are first sent from the departments of primary and secondary education to the field supervisors, who then pass them along to the school directors. The directors return them to the supervisors, who transmit them to the statistical units of the departments of primary and secondary education. After some initial hand tabulations are made for the purposes of those departments, the questionnaires are delivered to the planning department. The average time between the initial delivery of the forms to the supervisors and their return to the planning department is between three and four months. The main source of delay seems to be in the schools, where the forms are often regarded as a nuisance. Significantly, forms sent out by the Department of Personnel are sent back much more quickly, undoubtedly because they are the basis for salary payments.

Adding to these delays is the very slow pace of data processing within the statistics division of the planning department. The main problem is that all tabulations must be made by hand. Electronic calculators are available for adding up the totals for a given cell of data, but the initial sorting of forms is completely manual. This means that few or no tabulations can be made until all of the forms arrive, for the sheer work involved is too great to justify a preliminary sorting. As a result the statistics staff often has periods of down time as they wait for laggard forms to arrive from the schools. Then, once the questionnaires are available, they must be arranged by geographic regions, checked for errors and omissions, and matched against a complete listing of schools. Thus another three months may pass from the time that the forms are ready for processing until the hand tabulations

are complete. Additional time is necessary to write up and publish the resulting data.

3) Quality of the data. Serious questions were also raised about the validity of some of the data reported on the school questionnaires. The strongest criticism came from a director with many years of experience in the Ministry:

The data from planning are a lie--I tell them to put down the truth. I have great doubts about these data. (WHY?) Because the school directors want to keep their positions. So they inflate the data--invent students. This is very common and it even occurs in the (capital) city.

The root cause of poor quality is the unwillingness of the school administrators to take the forms seriously. In their defense it should be noted that these are not the only questionnaires they must complete, and that the Ministry has done little to explain the importance and uses of the data. Another source of invalidity is the tendency of teachers and school directors to inflate reported enrollments as a means of protecting their positions. Validity is also not helped by changes in the persons filling out the forms, and inconsistency in the reporting standards to be followed. While in theory the school director is responsible for the questionnaires, in practice this task is often delegated to the school's secretary, or even to one of the teachers. Moreover, when a teacher is used one year the director will often decide that it is someone else's turn the next year, so that inter-year consistency is further reduced. To complicate matters, those completing the forms are often unclear about the precise meaning of key terms, such as average daily attendance. Partly this is a matter of ambiguous

instructions; partly of a lack of training in how the forms are to be prepared; and partly of rotating reporters.

4) Duplication of efforts. The Ministry wastes considerable time and effort through duplication of work in its data collection activities. The most obvious example is the two-stage processing of the school questionnaires. These first pass through the statistics units of the departments of primary and secondary education, where preliminary tabulations are made, and then move to the planning department, where the same forms are again processed. The reason for this repetition is that the tabulations must be done by hand in both cases, and the needs of the two users are so different that the work cannot be combined. The Department of Personnel also collects data which overlaps with that gathered in the school forms.

5) Insufficient data. The present system yields only a small amount of statistical information, and this is often presented in categories which do not serve the needs of other departments. For example, the planning department currently tabulates data on school attendance with a control for 19 geographic districts. For the purposes of the Department of Primary Education, however, it would be useful to have the same data tabulated for their 40 supervisory districts. With the slowness of hand processing and the already strong pressures to come out with the mainline results, the planning department is not in a position to carry out more refined tabulations. Our interviews also elicited numerous suggestions for specific studies and tabulations that would be of interest to other departments in the Ministry.

4.4 Summary of Transactional Context

It will now be helpful to apply the key questions discussed earlier to the specific situation of Agraria. A brief summary such as that to be presented will usually highlight the contextual features with the greatest bearing on planning or program implementation.

4.4.1 Who counts for planning? : Aside from the planning staff itself, the most crucial actors in the power setting are the Minister and the other department directors in the Ministry of Education. They will be the main consumers of increased planning activities, and the individuals with the strongest veto power over expansion. Also significant within the Ministry are the field supervisors and school directors, whose cooperation will be essential for any improvement in administrative statistics; and the teachers, who can either help or obstruct data gathering and other planning activities. Outside the Ministry the pivotal figures would include the President, who could stop any planning operation generating excessive controversy; the ruling party, which controls appointments to the federal bureaucracy; and liaison staff in the Ministry of Finance, who ultimately control the budget for education.

4.4.2 What is the demand for educational planning? Overall the demand for an expansion in educational planning is modest, but strong enough in the right places to support some new activities. Specifically,

a. Who wants planning? The main source of demand, as well as the main potential source of opposition, is the other directors in the Ministry of Education, particularly those for primary and secondary education. The donor agencies providing assistance in education, especially AID and the World Bank, are a second but not very powerful source of demand.

b. What kind of planning do they want? Despite their profession of interest in genuine planning and inter-departmental coordination, the department directors are primarily interested in improved information on such questions as school enrollments and completion rates. The theoretical demand is for planning, but the effective demand is for better data. The donor agencies are not specific in their preferences, but they also lean toward solid statistics for use in monitoring and evaluating educational performance.

c. Is demand likely to change? There are signs that a forthcoming change in the economic scene may encourage rapid industrialization and thereby increase the attractiveness of educational planning. For the moment, however, the effects of these economic shifts will be largely counterbalanced by the government's strong fear of violence and its deeply ingrained preference for political stability. Our best guess is that effective demand will increase slowly for a few years, and perhaps more rapidly if industrialization really takes hold.

4.4.3 What is the capability for planning? Such capability as exists is largely concentrated in the planning department, although other units, especially primary education, carry out some planning activities. The following comments refer to the planning department.

a. What is the staff capacity for planning? Present staff capacity for planning is low, but the potential for improvement is moderately good. No one in the organization, including the director, could accurately be called an educational planner in the sense of someone who is well versed in the techniques of planning. Two of the division chiefs are reasonably familiar

with planning statistics, and have considerable potential for improvement. Most of the staff, however, are clerical in skills, activities, and mentality. With adequate training the organization as a whole could be brought to a higher level of competence, especially on data processing and analysis, but it does not now have the makings of a first-class planning unit of the kind found in El Salvador.

b. What is the technical capacity for analysis? The technical resources for planning, such as data-processing equipment, are minimal. Staff competence to use mechanical or electronic data processing equipment is also low, although it could be markedly improved through training.

c. What is the organizational capacity for planning? The internal organizational capacity of the planning department is adequate for a low-level planning operation. While staff motivation and professionalism are scant, the department is able to work together as a team and there are no crippling conflicts or rivalries visible to the naked eye. The director seems remote from the staff, but is able to provide enough leadership to accomplish the unit's present work. The department's external relations are limited and in some respects precarious, but the prognosis for certain types of collaboration is good. Other department heads are wary of initiative by the planning director, but also express a clear interest in better coordination and improved information on the educational system.

4.4.4 What are the critical issues surrounding planning? The principal energizing issue within the Ministry is the need for better data. While the energizing capacity of this issue is low, it is sufficient to stir interest in greater activity by the planning department. The greatest potential

debilitating issue is a fear by other directors of a "power grab" by the director of planning. Any planning activity which seemed destined to increase this director's access to the minister, prestige, authority, or visibility could easily turn this fear into strong opposition. A possible debilitating issue coming from the larger political environment is a fear of uncertainty or social instability. Educational planning cast as a means of planning for change, and thus reducing uncertainty, might strike a positive chord. Planning that became associated with massive or unpredictable social change, on the other hand, would be rejected as dissonant with national values.

4.4.5 What environmental conditions are likely to impinge on planning?

As already suggested, the foremost environmental conditions bearing on planning, as on the entire government, are threat and uncertainty. The perceived threat of popular insurrection, according to one director, leads the government to de-emphasize education, and above all higher education, as a national priority. The government's strong emphasis on political stability and domestic security also engenders a widespread preference for continuity and gradualism in governmental actions. Rapid change in education or elsewhere would not be regarded with favor.

5.0 Relating Planning to Context

Although we were less explicit then than now in laying out the transactional context for planning, the author and Advisor F did review most of the points raised earlier. With this information the author then drafted a strategy for change covering basic principles, organizational models, and action steps. The following is a condensed version of its major points.

5.1 Principles

To be effective, any effort to improve the planning department should observe four principles:

- 1) The change should satisfy a felt need within the Ministry. The locus of the need may be the planning department itself, other departments, or the senior officials of the Ministry. The ideal change proposal is one that responds to the needs of all three. At this time the clearest felt needs in the planning area are for improved statistical information and greater coordination.
- 2) The process of designing the change should involve all major parties likely to benefit from, be harmed by, or otherwise be significantly affected by the modification. For instance, in introducing mechanized data processing the planning unit should seek the participation of the units most directly affected by the change, including the departments of primary and secondary education. It would be a mistake for planning alone to introduce the new system, and then announce it to other departments.
- 3) The change should avoid disruptions in the Ministry's accustomed patterns of authority and decision-making. Specifically, the planning unit should not create the impression that its operations will reduce the authority of any other department, nor greatly alter existing patterns of inter-departmental relations. This is a difficult assignment, for the aim of change is to change, and yet successful change must not appear drastic or disruptive. Given the traditions and understandings in the Ministry, it would be essential to avoid the appearance of increasing the planning unit's power over other departments or of reducing the freedom of contact between department directors and the Minister.

4) The design of the change should strike a continuing balance among three elements:

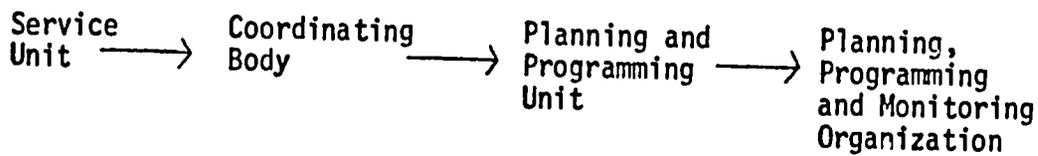
- technical improvements, such as a mechanized system of data processing or a more efficient form for data collection;
- staff capacity, particularly the ability of the planning unit's personnel to carry out more sophisticated data analysis; and
- inter-unit relations: especially the interactions between the planning unit and other departments in the Ministry.

Thus it would be counterproductive to increase staff capacity for data analysis without better data, or to produce more sophisticated data without raising staff capacity. Similarly, increasing the supply of data will do little good unless there is an increased demand for statistics in other departments. Whereas, while increasing this demand will only lead to frustration unless there is a sufficient supply. And, at a more subtle level, the planning department must realize that the ultimate success of increased activity will depend heavily on the good will and collaboration of other departments. Little would be gained if the planning department were to increase the volume of data and raise the capacity of its staff, only to find that its services were rejected out of resentment or jealousy. The development of a stronger capacity for planning must be organic, seeking a balance among technical and staff capacity as well as demand and receptivity in the entire Ministry.

5.2 Organizational Models

Beyond these principles, the director and staff of the planning department should seriously consider the type of organization that they are and wish to become. The experience of other countries suggests four possible models for

a planning department: (1) a service unit; (2) a coordinating body; (3) a planning and programming unit; and (4) a planning, programming, and monitoring organization. In the present case it would be useful to view these on a continuum, with progress toward one unit stimulating movement toward the next, up to the point that the Ministry finds appropriate. The sequence would be:



This is, of course, not a matter of predetermined evolution, so that the stages need not be sequential. But in the transactional context of the Ministry, a too-rapid leap from service to programming and monitoring would almost certainly create difficulties.

1) Service unit. The essential mission of a planning department cast as a service unit would be to assist other departments and agencies in such areas as statistical data, budget preparation, and research. The first requirement is a clear picture of the informational and other needs of the interested departments, such as primary and secondary education and curriculum. This model has the distinct advantage of building credibility by actually delivering services to other departments and yet avoiding the impression of excessive intervention by the planning unit. The Ministry now seems ready for increased service activities, particularly in the area of statistical data and research. This is not a satisfactory model on a long-run basis, however, for it does not include active planning and programming except at the request of other units.

2) Coordinating body. In this model the planning department would go beyond simple service by taking direct steps to promote information-sharing and other joint action toward common goals. To be successful, however, coordination should be closer to facilitation than direction. The planning unit might, for instance, serve as a clearing house for information about other departments in the Ministry and other agencies in the government, but without ordering recalcitrant departments to participate in this exercise. Under this arrangement planning would not plan for any other unit, but it might, by mutual agreement, plan with interested departments.

3) Planning and programming unit. Planning would reach an even more active stage when the department began to take responsibility for plans and programs in each area of the Ministry's activities. Long-term plans can be useful as indications of projected activities, but even more useful in many situations are annual plans and programs linked to the corresponding budget. At present the planning department does review budget submissions from other departments, but it does not engage in real planning and programming. More activities of this sort could be introduced even under the existing system, but it seems unwise to move too quickly in the direction of active planning. This role will be more acceptable when the department has established its credentials and credibility as a service and coordinating body.

4) Planning, programming, and monitoring organization. In this final stage the planning unit would take additional responsibility for monitoring the adherence of all departments to established plans. This is obviously a technically complex role, and one evoking political overtones. A complaint about the educational planning organization in El Salvador was that its

inquiries about compliance with established goals were really a disguised form of control (McGinn and Warwick, 1978). Discussions about this model should be saved until the planning department is at least partially successful at planning and programming.

5.3 Action Steps

The proposed action steps are of two kinds: immediate efforts likely to produce favorable results in a relatively short time; and long-term steps dealing with more basic and complex problems. The planning department should begin with the former and, if the results are generally positive, move to the latter. Given the political climate in the Ministry, it would be a mistake to undertake a large number of changes in the beginning.

5.3.1 Immediate Steps

The steps recommended for immediate attention involve improvements in the Ministry's statistical information system. The reasons for beginning here are that this area represents a strongly felt need in several departments, including the two largest units; it is an area generally acknowledged to be the responsibility of the planning department; the topic is not inherently controversial; and there is an excellent chance of success. The last point is important, for planning will not want to begin with a project that is likely to fail. An opening disaster could spell doom for later changes.

The Ministry should consider an integrated package designed to handle the technical, professional, and relational aspects of an improved information system. The package has five components:

- 1) Introducing mechanical data processing. There are strong advantages and few disadvantages in changing over to keypunched data and mechanical data

processing. The planning department should take immediate steps to have the majority of its new statistical data keypunched, and it should consider the possibility of purchasing, renting, or otherwise gaining access to tabulation equipment. It is likely that one or more donor agencies would be open to requests for assistance in this area.

2) Designing new forms for data-collection. The introduction of data processing equipment would offer an excellent opportunity for interested departments to collaborate on the design of new forms to be filled out by the schools. The existing questionnaires have many flaws, and are not set up for keypunching. As a general principle, the quality of the questionnaires should at least equal the quality of the data processing system. And, apart from questions of content, the process of developing more adequate questionnaires has the distinct advantage of bringing together several key departments that have had little contact with each other.

3) Determining the high-priority information needs of other departments. The chief benefit of a mechanized data processing system is that it will allow the planning department to gather and publish a broader range of information for use in the Ministry. To capitalize on this advantage the planning unit would meet with each interested department to determine its highest priority needs for data. The central question should not be all information needs, but the most urgent needs that can be satisfied through the new system. Ideally, these discussions should be held before the new forms are designed, for they might provide concrete suggestions for change.

4) Developing a plan for continuing statistics. Discussions with department directors, parallel discussions with the national planning office.

and an internal review of the planning department's own priorities should provide a solid basis for devising a plan for continuing statistics on education. With the increased flexibility and speed of mechanical data processing and with improved questionnaires it should not be difficult to expand the volume of statistics produced. At the same time, budgetary constraints and limited staff time will require that priorities be determined.

5) Increasing staff capabilities for statistical analysis. The foregoing plan assumes that mechanized data processing will free up the planning staff for more extensive analysis and interpretation of data. To meet this challenge key staff members, particularly in the statistics division, will need additional training in data analysis. Much of the training required for this first stage could be provided in the office through well-designed exercises using data from the Ministry.* The staff could profit especially from exercises which begin with an administrative or policy question, translate this question into hypotheses and data, and then test these hypotheses with data collected by the planning department.

While the direct focus of these five steps is on improved statistics, they also deal indirectly with the problem of coordination. The merit of the

*As part of the technical assistance from Harvard, Advisors E and F did, in fact, provide this type of training. Using the existing forms and hand tabulation, they assisted the planning staff not only to analyze and interpret policy-related data, but to summarize the results in tabular and prose form.

approach outlined here is that it could bring about improved coordination, at least between planning and other departments, without calling meetings dealing explicitly with that topic, which is sensitive.

5.3.2 Long-term Actions

The immediate actions represent a large agenda of work, one requiring at least a year and probably more. While concentrating on improving its information system, the planning department might also look ahead to possible action on larger questions facing itself and the Ministry. The following are among those most needing attention.

1) Improving the quality of the data collected from schools. This is a complex matter involving not only numbers and forms but also professional motivation, pay, authority, communication, and the entire educational system. Any permanent solution to the data problem will require the joint efforts of planning, the departments of primary and secondary education, and possibly other departments, including personnel. The discussion of new forms for data collection might address, in a general way, the larger issues of quality, motivation, and control. The planning department could take the initiative in highlighting these questions, and in setting the stage for later action.

2) Promoting inter-unit coordination. Many directors would like to see more effective coordination and less isolation in the Ministry, but some would be highly suspicious of any attempt by the planning department to bring about those conditions. Still, probably no harm would be done if the planning staff were to raise the question of coordination in a general way when discussing information needs with other directors. The planning department might also

consider ways in which it could serve more effectively as a clearinghouse for information of use to other departments.

3) Developing internal capacity for planning. The planning department now does little planning, and will probably not increase its activities in this area during the first stage of change. It is likely, however, that success in this first stage will increase the demand for a more active planning role in later years. The planning department would thus be wise to assess its present planning capability, and to take steps to increase this capability over the next four or five years. Two possibilities are possible even in the short run, neither of which should occasion political problems in the Ministry. One is internal training of the sort provided by the Harvard team, or more formal courses covering the concepts and techniques of planning. The second possibility is long-term training (one year or more) for selected staff members at foreign institutions, such as Harvard or Stanford University or the International Institute for Educational Planning in Paris. Once again, the director should try to strike a balance between training and the likely uses of the trainees' new skills in the department. To bring a Ph.D. into the present situation would generate more frustration than improvements in planning.

4) Devising a long-term plan for research. At present the planning department does not have a well-developed strategy or plan for research, nor is its internal research capacity very strong. The department should first ask about the priority it wishes to attach to research as distinct from its regular statistical operations. If the decision is to be more active in this area, it might be helpful to explore research interests with other departments and perhaps with outside organizations, such as the national planning office. The department should also develop a plan for increasing its own capability for conducting research.

6.0 Epilogue

We delivered our report to the planning director in November, 1977. Given the obvious delicacy of the issues raised, and the fact that the director had been singled by them in the recent past, we were somewhat apprehensive about how the document would be received. Our concerns grew as we waited for several days with no reply or comment from the director, who was reportedly busy with an assignment from the Minister. Finally the call came to discuss the report. As Advisor F and the writer took our seats at a table in the director's office, he locked the door and switched off the telephone connections. The drama was higher than in any of our previous meetings in the same office.

With this build-up we were relieved to hear that the director found the report "99 percent accurate." He seemed quite amazed, in fact, that two outsiders with little prior exposure to Agraria had been able to pick up some of the central features of bureaucratic life in the Ministry of Education. After some initial discussion about "now you can see why it is so difficult to do anything around here," we moved on to the substance of our recommendations. The director understood and appreciated the logic of beginning with expanded service to other units, and agreed with the emphasis on data processing as the point of entry. But we had the sense that, despite this broad agreement with its conclusions, the report's radioactivity level was still too high for comfort and that the director would need more time to think through its implications. He said that he would ponder these points between then and our next visit, and might discuss them with one or two trusted members of his staff.

Before we left, Advisors E and F also set up a program of analysis and writing for the planning staff, with some specific assignments to be completed by February.

Advisors E and F returned to the Ministry in late March, 1978. They found that the planning staff had carried out most of the suggested statistical analyses and had prepared some reports using these data. Studies proposed for other units in the planning department had not fared well at all. One director had collected some pro forma information that was readily available at the front office, but had carried out no real analysis. Another person found the assignment too demanding, and requested a medical leave for several months. The only real progress was in the area of statistics, but this was fortunately the central focus of the organizational development effort.

There was one unexpected advance. Using their own ideas as well as some of our suggestions, two key figures in planning decided to re-design the basic data collection forms sent to the schools. Not only had they begun to draft a revamped form, but they had held discussions about the changes with their counterparts in primary and secondary education. The head of programming control, who took the initiative on this project, felt that, in the light of past failures to get any movement at the level of the directors, it would be worth pursuing the possibility at the level of the "workers." Thus, while the Harvard team was there, this person organized several meetings involving the planning staff and members of the Department of Primary Education,

including its heads of statistics and of teaching personnel as well as several field supervisors. No directors attended these meetings.

The exchanges had very positive results. The head of Programming Control came to the first meeting with a new data collection form for the primary level. She reviewed each item, slowly and carefully, indicating why the old version did not meet the needs of the Ministry, and why the new one might be better. She also listened attentively to comments made by her counterparts in primary education, and generally agreed to their suggestions for change. At the first meeting the head of planning in primary seemed skeptical of the new form, but was eventually convinced that it would make her work easier. This process continued until there was a general consensus among the participants. By the time that the Harvard team left Agraria a revised form had been drafted, examined by the planning director, and was to be sent to the printer.

Other opportunities for cross-departmental interactions grew out of the statistical analyses underway in the planning department. The results brought out inexplicable irregularities in the distribution of enrollments by age and grade, especially in the lower grades. This puzzle was finally raised in a meeting between the staff of the planning and primary education departments. The participants from primary offered several hypotheses for these anomalies, all of which assumed that the data submitted by the schools were reliable. When these explanations were challenged, they continued to be intrigued by the problem and offered to allow the Harvard group and the planning staff to visit a few schools to check the data. From a list of twenty schools showing the greatest irregularities in reporting, they selected two that were different in the quality of their administration.

The two schools were visited by Advisor F the head of the statistics division in planning, and an assistant from that division. They retabulated all the data for two consecutive years, following individual students on the basis of names and recording their ages. The results showed considerable inaccuracy in the reporting of ages, with a systematic bias toward listing students in the second grade as older than they were, and first grade repeaters as younger. The head of statistics and especially the assistant, who had been a school principal, were impressed with these findings, and wrote a report summarizing the situation. Although the findings were far from earthshaking, they did challenge the notion of an infallible reporting system, and thus opened the way to further discussion about the quality of data from the schools. This was probably the first criticism ever written by the planning staff about the Ministry's statistics system. In the meantime the planning staff also pushed ahead with a study on unit costs in schools. The large variation in costs among schools supposedly providing the same education raised a further topic for discussion.

Finally, the planning director thought that the time was ripe for a meeting of directors. This session was held in June, 1978, with participation by the directors of primary and secondary education, curriculum, guidance, and others, as well as the director and key staff of planning. Advisors E and F began the discussion by summarizing the steps followed by the Harvard team, including the interviews with the directors. They then reviewed the data prepared on access to the educational system, commenting specifically on the questions of multi-grade classrooms, double shifting, incomplete schools, and the like. They drew attention to the very slow growth

of the system, and the lack of opportunities for many rural children. Using the results prepared by the planning unit, they argued that the major barrier was buildings, not teachers. They also showed that repeater rates were grossly underestimated, while dropout rates were overestimated. The main reason for repeating grades, they pointed out, was a lack of space in the upper grades--a clear argument for expanding school capacity. Moreover, by expanding class size from 29 to 35 or 40 it would be possible to enroll many more children in the system.

None of these observations was revolutionary, but this did seem to be the first time that the directors had heard these kinds of criticisms about their system--criticisms that could not be refuted by administrative intuitions or off-the-cuff empiricism. The planning staff had done its homework with the data, even with the limitation of hand tabulation, and had presented the findings in ways directly amenable to policy discussions. Even the director of primary education, whose system was implicitly criticized in the presentation, seemed to react positively. The group then reviewed some policy alternatives that might alleviate the problems of access.

The prime accomplishment in this meeting was not the skillful collection and presentation of data nor any specific discussion of policy, but rather that the directors came together on a matter of common interest and drew on effective staff work by the planning unit. They seemed genuinely interested in understanding the problems in their system, and in trying some of the suggestions made, all of which were possible within the current framework. Undoubtedly, the outside advisors helped to break the interdepartmental impasse and to legitimize the discussion of policy-related data. Outsiders are often useful for this purpose, and dispensable once it is accomplished. The planning staff, who

had prepared the ground for and witnessed these exchanges, now had some reason to hope that they might contribute to a process of change in the Ministry. Through careful analysis and joint action a modicum of good will and trust had been created.

As this case suggests, transactional analysis is more a diagnostic device than a talisman for charming away intractable bureaucratic and political problems. At best it will yield an estimate of the worth of any new action on planning, and suggest avenues which seem most and least promising. While there is always the danger that raised consciousness about pitfalls may cast a pall over innovation, the awareness may also be liberating. In Agraria the main effect of the diagnosis may well have been to show that, as difficult as the situation was at the level of the department directors, there was room for movement at the level below. Moreover, while the planning staff did not begin exactly where we suggested--with data processing equipment--they did take initiatives in the same general area of improved statistics. Another lesson from this exercise is that the analysis of context will have its greatest impact when it is combined with work in the substantive areas of analysis and planning. Knowledge about the Ministry context in Agraria was immensely more useful when it was combined with new and solid statistical data on the educational system. In the end, the technical and the political aspects must be kept together in the single whole of planning.

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