

# **The methodology of a minor miracle: Killing a myth through strategic planning in the Elam School of Fine Arts\***

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper reports the planning processes used in one of New Zealand's premier schools of fine art. Elam has a culture of exuberant individualism, high productivity and disciplinary sectionalism. There is a belief that it is cantankerously and inevitably unbiddable, and yet, paradoxically, it is well enough organised to shape New Zealand's cultural identity, consistently producing some of its finest visual artists and designers. Processes were drawn from action research, organisational development and educative leadership theory to develop a collective purpose with goals and objectives, and program plans and budgets for 1998. It is shown that there was no 'minor miracle' involved, just the death of a myth about Elam's incapacity to learn as a School.*

## **Introduction**

The Elam School of Art and Design was established in 1889 as an independent elementary and secondary school by a private bequest. Today it is a School of Fine Art within the Faculty of Arts in the University of Auckland. From its beginning it has encountered major challenges that have shaped its character, and thus, its capacity to act collectively as a School, to attract support from the University and to influence the history of art and art education in New Zealand (Calverley, 1937; Parton, 1979; Franks, 1984; Beatson and Beatson, 1994). Major challenges have included the quality of buildings, organisation and leadership, as detailed in an earlier paper. This paper focuses on recent planning activity.

To reiterate briefly, in 1990, at the instigation of the Vice Chancellor, the Academic Committee of the University appointed a Review Committee to evaluate the purposes, programmes, structures and resources of Elam. The 'Tarling Report' (University of Auckland, 1991) recommended that the University raise the external responsiveness of the School, double its size from 1992, add another 3-4 storey building and "rid the wooden mansions of animal pests" (p. 9). Extensive curriculum development was also recommended; retain existing subjects (Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Printmaking, Graphic Design and a more broadly defined Intermedia), introduce Maori and Pacific Art, rationalise Design in consultation with Architecture Property

and Planning, increase student access to Art History, replace Studio Theory papers, limit the development of cinematic film, lower the degree of specialisation from second year, raise preparation for professional practice, rationalise art teacher education in consultation with the Auckland College of Education, permit cross crediting, and plan the development of a graduate school. It was also recommended that staff set objectives for their courses, use criteria approved by Senate (Deans' Committee) for assessment and make them available to students, provide descriptive feedback to students in addition to marks or grades, and develop a student handbook.

The Review noted, rather pointedly, that implementation of the proposed changes “will need enthusiastic cooperation from staff and other parts of the University. It will also need convinced, dedicated and energetic leadership” (p. 21). While the Review acknowledged that the Dean’s “modesty and courtesy and his capacity to listen have helped produce an ambience of friendly collaboration and a caring atmosphere” (p. 21), it recommended that an additional chair be advertised “with the rider that the person appointed would become Dean and Head of School for an initial period of five years” (p. 22). The tasks for the new Dean were clarified; reduce sectionalisation, establish an effective staff/ student consultative process, build links across the University, develop a staffing plan with balance, gender equity and supportive arrangements, boost research, and review resource use.

Professor Michael Dunn was appointed Dean in 1994. He set priorities. The first was to give Maori Art (Te Toi Hou) refurbished facilities, despite some problems. The Masters of Fine Arts Programme was distinguished more from the Bachelor of Fine Arts, given some dedicated staff and a more rigorous exposure to theory. A colleague was attracted from Art History to provide specialist teaching in theory (Shand, 1997). Staff turnover was used to convert tenured positions to short-term contracted tutorships allowing a better age and gender balance. Semesterisation led to a review of in-house papers and identified some that “tended to be light on curriculum structure and directed learning” (Dunn, 1997). In search of economies the printing press was sold and the printing press research unit, the foundry and the glass workshop were closed. A doctorate of Fine Arts (DocFA) was introduced, the first in New Zealand, with the first enrollees starting in 1997. The struggle to improve the buildings was resumed as the financial and political contexts worsened.

### **The Context of Managed Change**

The 1960s and early 1970s had been periods of dramatic growth in New Zealand’s higher education. Massey and Waikato universities were constructed, Canterbury University was relocated, and Auckland, Wellington, Otago and Lincoln were largely rehoused on expanded existing sites, with Auckland getting a new medical school.

This scale of expenditure, however, could not be sustained given New Zealand's economic realities and adverse demographic trends. The cut backs in the 1980s revealed the fundamental weaknesses of the system.

Despite 15 years of favourable funding, tertiary education in New Zealand has been only shallowly established and has always been relatively impoverished compared to older and more lavishly funded Australian, American, British, and European university systems. It costs, for example, twice as much to educate a British student and a third more to educate an Australian student. Because they had less in the first place, therefore, the New Zealand universities were hit more severely than those overseas by inflation and the Government's unwillingness to supplement their grants. (Gustafson, 1981, pp. 208-9)

The Elam School of Fine Arts could not be sheltered from these pressures. Indeed, the signs became particularly ominous in 1997 at local and national levels. Elam had four aggressive competitors in the Auckland region, and others elsewhere, many of whom had higher growth rates, more attractive buildings and better facilities. One conclusion (Simpson, 1997) was that Elam has not attracted comparable levels of institutional investment. Another was that failed to reposition itself.

Another source of pressure for change was political. The New Zealand Government's June 1997 Green Paper, *A Future Qualifications Policy for New Zealand: A Plan for the National Qualifications Framework*, proposed a standardisation of all educational qualifications as a way of recognising students' achievements. While it acknowledged the "rapidly changing world" (p. 6), the Green Paper assumed that knowledge itself was largely given and could be plausibly partitioned into units, all learning could therefore be assessed in terms of unit standards, and therefore, that curriculum should be narrowed to (and commodified as) competencies and skills. The primary justification was that qualifications should "convey to students and employers a value that is clear and credible" (p. 6).

The stress in this justification on economic relationships and values was in sharp contrast to the broader range of values implied by the aesthetic education long offered by the Elam School of Fine Arts, and by other components of university education. Nevertheless, the September 1997 Green Paper, *A Future Tertiary Education Policy for New Zealand: Tertiary Education Review*, proposed to cap the governments' level of contribution and to focus attention on possible funding mechanisms. The government was evidently considering the separation of teaching and research funding at undergraduate levels, making the research funds thus released more contestable, and introducing bulk funding or student entitlements to raise the level of responsiveness of institutions.

It followed that the budget round in the University of Auckland began in 1997 for 1998 in dire circumstances. All 'principal activity centres,' such as the Elam School of Fine Arts, were asked to prepare strategic plans and program budgets that backed up into a mission statement, and goals and objectives for 1998. They were also to make full provision, for the first time, for voluntary retirements, appointments, other salary related costs and occupancy costs. Two issues required immediate clarification at Elam; the nature of key purposes, and, how could they be specified?

## **Methodology**

Dunn engaged the author as a consultant, explaining the urgent need to redefine Elam's purposes, and noting the "enormous difficulty" they had when trying to make decisions when "conflicting stories" undercut the possibility of agreement. These levels of values dissonance and decisional incapacity were confirmed by the Registrar (Nicoll, 1997), who noted that it would be "nothing short of a minor miracle if they all faced in the same direction." Dunn (1997) also recalled realising, after a few attempts to prepare such a document, that any 'Dean's Vision' for Elam would be contested as invalid. And yet, despite his colleagues reputation for idiosyncrasy and individualism, qualities "often expressed with unrestrained determination," he insisted that they also had "an unusual depth of professional commitment and dedication to the discipline that should be tapped into." Hence, with "absolutely no idea about what the outcomes might be," his consultations in Elam suggested that it might be wise to "offer a process for collective thinking" to prepare the budget bid for 1998.

This methodological decision related to others. Dunn (1997) felt that he had inherited, and had to endure, anger against leadership. By "forcing all controversial issues onto open Department meeting agendas" and passing regular trials of his "patience, fairness and reliability" he felt that he had gradually achieved an "uneasy peace." On the other hand, he found himself becoming increasingly impatient with "the tedious litanies of Jeremiahs who could see no prospect of progress in Elam." He was, therefore, very supportive when the School collectively made the decision to use the University budgetary process to generate more cooperative thinking about futures.

Dunn's practical planning in 1997 for 1998 had started with a review of the achievement of programme objectives and the continuing appropriateness of those objectives. More broadly he wanted to further develop the sense of unity rather than give ground again to partisan views. As noted in an earlier paper, he said

I want to build on these fresh holistic views of what Elam's on about, to keep people working together and respecting administration as a part of the team

effort. I am tired of the 20 years of ‘them and us’ adversarial relationships. Heads of sections will need support to help carry this through. Students are demanding staff accountability, value for money, proper staff availability, staff regularly giving attention and advice, and that section leaders sort out the absence of staff scheduled to teach.

Several rounds of consultation were needed to convince academic and technical staff and student representatives that there was good reason to participate. The basic method used was open-ended discussion about what plans and planning were, the nature of the political and financial contexts that implied the urgent need for collective thinking, the sharing of prior experience of both authentic and more limited forms of collective planning, developing preliminary ideas about the ways in which knowledge claims might be evaluated, how decisions over priorities would be made, and the most desirable outcomes of the Elam planning process. There was, as might be expected in the circumstances, degrees of barely concealed cynicism evident, mildly amused contempt for language that smacked of corporate managerialism, and some instances of patent disbelief in the possibility of a positive outcome. During interviews subsequent to the planning process, a number of staff traced their initial scepticism to their experience of the internal review in 1989, that they felt was a sham or went nowhere, and to the time taken to implement the 1991 ‘Tarling Report’.

The basic purpose for collective or corporate planning accepted by a large majority in Elam was that the process had to be potentially beneficial for all participants, for the School, and for Art. In practical terms, it came to be understood that the process had to

- clarify the collective purpose or mission of Elam,
- clarify the aims and objectives of the School for 1998,
- enable sections to develop detailed program budget bids for 1998, that would,
- define, bottom-up, the Elam budget bid for 1998.

Given the culture of Elam, components of a collaborative action research process were selected. This approach is interpretivist, constructivist (McCutcheon and Jurg, 1990), inclusionary, practical and deliberative (Grundy, 1988; McKernan, 1991). It allows all stakeholders and a researcher/ facilitator to come together, suspend status, and research common problems in a way that generates shared understandings and commitment (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988).

Action research tends to use a seven-step cycle; collective concept mapping, specifying the problem in context, considering prior knowledge and consulting widely, synthesising information and optional sets of explanations and solutions, making decisions and plans, acting in teams to achieve specific objectives, comparing

outcomes to objectives and reporting, and then repeating the cycle. Given the irregular experience of Elam in collective planning, relatively few external sources or external coherence tests were used, although this could be a more evident feature in future planning cycles.

The process used was also informed by cultural theories of how organisations may be developed. Organization development (OD) has been defined (Schein, 1992, p. 316) “as a planned change process, managed from the top, taking into account both the technical and human sides of the organization and using inside and outside consultants in the planning and implementation of the changes to be made.” It is not uncommon for the founding culture of an organization to diversify over time into a range of subcultures, and when they begin to use collective resources to compete, leaders are required to use OD processes to identify the most appropriate collective or corporate culture. Hence, the job of “organization development practitioners,” can often be to bring together “diverse and sometimes warring subcultures”(p. 316).

OD assumes that, in the interests of continuous learning rather than irregular and traumatic interventions, an organization “must have some mechanisms to permit cognitive redefinition as a way of developing new assumptions” (p. 332) which must then be refrozen when they “consistently solve problems or reduce anxieties” (p. 332). Schein (1992) also recommended that such learning and change should not be “imposed on people” as they need to be involved in “diagnosing what is going on, figuring out what to do, and actually doing it” themselves (p. 392). The assumption here is that organizations are communities of people who will compete wastefully for power and resources with differences of opinion and of values, and conflicts of priorities and goals, unless the collective culture is strong enough underpins their practices with a strong sense of mission, coherent purposes, objectives and programs, and cooperative norms.

The third source of ideas related to appropriate forms of leadership service. Educative leadership promotes the growth of knowledge in a learning community (Duignan and Macpherson, 1992), especially coherent knowledge about purposes, strategies, the use of power, cultural development, effective management and formative evaluation (Macpherson, 1996). To this end, educative leaders seek to offer a comprehensive, coherent, balanced and integrated set of services that clarify and publicly discharge obligations:

- philosophical leadership, to help determine what is right and to improve the ‘moral economy’ of the organisation;
- strategic leadership, to identify significance, trends in the context, options and consequences;
- political leadership, to boost commitment and realign social reality,

- cultural leadership, to mobilise and legitimate changes to norms and practices;
- managerial leadership, to use and develop resources effectively and efficiently; and
- evaluation leadership, to measure the achievement of objectives and to review purposes.

Having clarified how purposes related to assumptions and investigative frameworks, particular methods were designed and employed.

## Methods

The overall planning process negotiated between April and June 1997 is summarised in Table 1. There were some staff who missed all phases of the negotiations and were surprised by apparent short notice for workshops. Each phase required a three hour workshop between July and the end of August, except Phase 6, which required a special set of lengthy discussions.

TABLE 1. The Strategic Planning Process used in the Elam School of Fine Arts

Phase	Purpose	Activity
1	Build a Draft Vision for the Elam School of Fine Arts	Collaborative planning process in the Staff Common Room involved Students
2	Clarify Issues Raised by the Draft Vision	Specialists gave briefings to Elam Staff and Students
3	Revise the Draft Review and Begin Section Planning	Collaborative Review of the Draft Vision Identify Section Objectives, etc. for 1998
4	Peer Revision of Section Plans for 1998	Sections displayed Plans Feedback accepted from Colleagues
5	Collate the Draft School Strategic Plan	Section Heads delivered Plans and collated the Strategic Plan with Dean
6	Transparent Program Budgeting	Section Heads and Dean negotiated Program Budgets
7	Justify Staffing, Equipment and Resources for 1998	Dean presented Strategic Plan and Budget Bids to the Expenditure Review Committee

Phase 1 was achieved by using a columnar gestalt technique. It is a combination of data collection and manual qualitative factor analysis. To begin data collection at the first workshop, each participant was asked to jot down personal answers to three similar questions. What should Elam School be? What should Elam stand for? What ideas must appear in any mission statement for Elam? This process took about 15

minutes. It was, not incidentally, impossible for a stranger to discern who of the 40 odd participants were academic or general staff and who were students.

Random pairings were then assigned. Each person had to explain their ideas to person they did not often work with, and together, assemble a composite list, without losing any concepts. This process took about 25 minutes. On a number of occasions, participants had to be reminded that all ideas were to be equally valued as data.

The couples were then paired off into groups of four, where again explanations had to be given, ideas accepted and a composite list formulated. This process took about 20 minutes, indicating the gradual emergence of common ground. Each group of four was then asked to record their ideas in three to five words, in large block capitals, on A5 cards, one idea per card. Each group produced 12-20 cards.

Each group was then asked to donate a card, give a brief explanation and answer any questions. The card was then pinned to a large display wall. Cards with similar meanings were pinned under each other, and related clusters of cards were moved alongside each other. It was a highly visual, tactile, verbal and interactive form of factor analysis. As with more statistical methods, it was quickly realised that rules for interpretation were needed. For example, the data on each card had to be regarded as both metaphorical and provisional. Clarifications were permitted. Judgements were discouraged. The authors' meanings had to be given priority, unless they could be persuaded that another term was more appropriate.

After about 45 minutes the patterns to the data became evident, and extra cards were added as column headings and interpolated as sub-headings. Clusters of columns were similarly evident and labelled. A few extra cards were suggested and final cards were added. Gradually silence fell as participants took stock of the scope of, and the connections between, the components of their collective imagination. It was apparently an advance on the data generated by earlier planning processes and other self-managed reflections over the years, more advanced in the sense of being more inclusionary and more categorised by collective analysis. The reflective silence was eventually broken by a female voice from the back of the room; "I bet you have a really tidy bedroom too."

Two challenging issues were particularly evident in the policy context, issues that members of the School agreed required far more detail. One was the fresh emphasis in the University on Equal Employment Opportunities policy since the appointment of Pro Vice Chancellor (EEO), Dame Professor Anne Salmond. Second was the precarious financial situation of the University, according to the analysis of the newly appointed Director of Finance, Mr John Cowan. Salmond and Cowan were invited to, and subsequently gave, detailed and customised briefings to Elam, in Phase 2.



Phase 3 began with the facilitator providing a draft summary of the ideas still on display. Once modified to everyone's satisfaction, it was deemed to convey the plural goals and objectives of Elam for 1998. The group then quickly agreed a form of words that expressed the fundamental purposes of the School, and after a long complex argument concerning the name of the School and the role of contemporary critique discussed below, they were accepted as the Mission (see Table 2).

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TABLE 2. The Mission of the Elam School of Fine Arts

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The mission of the Elam School of Fine Arts is to initiate, promote and support the achievement and development of innovation, diversity and excellence in the practice, study and teaching of contemporary art and design and to advance an increased understanding of these engagements in academic, national and international cultural communities in accordance with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the University's 2001 policy.

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The discussion concerning the name of the School was triggered by a proposal from Design staff who asked that the School be renamed the Elam School of Fine Arts and Design. Another proposal was to insert 'Contemporary' into the title. After an exhaustive and often heated debate, the School decided not to change its name, although it did subsequently feature both 'Design' and 'contemporary' in the goals and objectives of the School.

A colleague considered to be a 'wordsmith' (Shand, 1997) was then commissioned to draft goals and objectives based on these collective views. Table 3 was affirmed unanimously at a later meeting, with some disbelief at the completion of this 'minor miracle.' An explanation more consistent with the evidence above, however, is that there was no minor miracle involved. More prosaically, they had just given lie to a myth; the myth that Elam staff are intrinsically incapable of thinking collectively.

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TABLE 3. The Goals and Objectives of the Elam School of Fine Arts

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While

- *Affirming* the importance and unique contribution of the fine arts and design to the cultural development of Aotearoa, New Zealand;
- *Recognising* the University's 2001 policy initiatives; and
- *Acknowledging* the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi;

The goals and objectives of The Elam School of Fine Arts are to:

- *Advance* the cultural identity of this nation;
- *Promote* innovation and diversity in the practice and study of contemporary art and design;
- *Foster* lively and critical debate;
- *Achieve* excellence in creative practice;
- *Develop* a vigorous inter-disciplinary post-graduate programme;
- *Maintain* high standards of academic rigour and scholarship;
- *Develop* and support innovation and excellence in teaching and research;
- *Establish* Elam as the premier art school in the Pacific;

*So as to enrich the University, regional, national and international cultural communities.*

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All sections were then asked to convene their own meetings, refer to the agreed Mission and Goals and Objectives, and then to use a common template to prepare program budgets. They were taken through fully worked examples of program budgets. The template required each section to name its principal activity, negotiate its objectives for 1998, define performance indicators and its client bases, specify the content of the service to be delivered, set out the delivery systems to be used, provide a budget using University cost code categories, and identify the responsibilities of the individuals involved.

Phase 4 began with a presentation of each section's draft program at an open meeting of Section Heads and colleagues, with each program given immediate critical feedback. The process started gently enough. It was soon realised that some sections had done a great deal more anticipatory thinking than others and that they were likely to be substantially advantaged. Others had drawn on more sophisticated data than others, developed major innovations, taken the opportunity to realign their priorities or propose major spending in their program area, or, in disbelief, had adopted a do-nothing or wait-and-see strategy. The concluding discussion stressed two agreements; first, that all sections now had to have the opportunity to revise their position in the light of feedback from colleagues, and second, that all program proposals had to better respond to the EEO policy and the difficult financial situation.

Phase 5 stretched over four three-hour open meetings chaired by the Dean. Each section's program was treated to a series of tests by other section heads and interested staff. The repetitive pattern that developed began with a review of program purposes, performance indicators and client groups, often relating them to trends in student

demand. Some of the questions asked were pointed, and there were periods of sustained tension, until agreements were reached. It was notable that the disciplinary standing of people, and their competence as teachers, were assumed. These two matters were professionally incontestable. There was an attempt to have the Dean accept a role as sole arbitrator of claims, and although most expressed a wish to retain collective responsibility for decisions, there was some residual desire for more assertive leadership in the public domain. What was contested was the level and nature of expenditure, most applying internal coherence tests for each program, while assuming a zero sum outcome across all programs. An example of a program plan, with the sensitive budgetary and personnel information removed, now follows. There were parallel program plans for all programs in Elam, including one for School Administrative Services.

Table 4 refers to the Design specialisation at BFA, MFA and DocFA levels. The BFA has a uniquely and highly personalised course structure that accommodates each student's developing interests, even into the final graduating year. The aim is to encourage "flexible and versatile thinkers who can organise, analyse and take responsibility for a variety of creative experiences in both 2D and 3D" (Simpson, 1997). The Design Section has a strong team culture which highly values open communication and cooperation.

**TABLE 4. The Design Program Plan**

<b>Objectives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide a challenging and dynamic course across all levels so as to produce versatile effective graduates capable of proposing inventive and innovative design solutions.</li> <li>• It is our intention that a design graduate would:</li> <li>• Be excited by, and interested in, the design process.</li> <li>• Be capable of responding creatively to problems.</li> <li>• Have begun to develop their own design ideology and particular field of interest.</li> <li>• Understand intellectually, as well as intuitively, the fundamental concepts of visual language (sufficient to analyse/critically evaluate examples of visual communication, forms and systems).</li> <li>• Be experienced in the application of a range of design methodologies.</li> <li>• Have sufficient knowledge of their own and other cultures, and art and design history, to allow them to see contemporary developments in context.</li> <li>• Have a knowledge of current technology and working practices in their particular field of interest.</li> <li>• Take account of human factors in inter-personal, social and design contexts.</li> <li>• Be able to co-operate and work in a team situation.</li> <li>• Be sensitive to the implications of design decisions and technology on both micro and macro environments.</li> <li>• Have a range of writing, speaking and drawing skills and an ability to project confidence and professionalism.</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Indicators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of projects and end of semester assessment by section staff, including self assessment by students, using standard procedures.</li> <li>• Evidence of individual progress and success on coursework.</li> <li>• Confident, in-depth student interaction, communication and participation.</li> <li>• Levels monitored through benchmarking.</li> <li>• Peer review at end of semesters, including external assessing.</li> <li>• Students able to manage and solve external design briefs.</li> <li>• Consistent student interest in design.</li> <li>• Staff performance reviews.</li> </ul>

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- Graduates excelling professionally.

**Clients**

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- School leavers (and their teachers)
- 1st year - Studio I students
- Studio II - IV and Masters students
- Students cross-crediting from other tertiary providers

**Content**

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- Practical assignment.
- Introduction to technical, manipulative, experimental practice, including materials and processes.
- Introduction to fundamental design methods, strategies (including communications skills).
- Traditional skills such as drawing to be creatively synthesised with new digital technologies.
- Digital media workshop programme dovetailed into coursework.
- Coursework that advances the students' manipulative, interpretative and critical skills.
- On-going critical analysis (self, peer, staff) of visual language concepts and creative thinking strategies.
- Programme to give an understanding of cultural and historical context of contemporary design work.

**Delivery**

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Practical projects of short, medium or long duration, Film, video, slide and internet presentations, Lecturers, demonstrations and workshops, Critical reviews/feedback on assignments, Seminars and group discussions, Written and research assignments, Student-led seminar series, Visits, Occasional Seminars by visiting speakers, On-going technical assistance in response to student needs, Reading lists, Course and briefing documentation, Negotiated individual student programmes at Studio IV, Individual tutorials

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In Phase 6 the Dean compounded all revised section bids using University expenditure codes and submitted the School Budget Bid using a summary template, attaching the mission statement and goals and objectives, and all section program plans and budgets. The rigour of the bid was greeted with some surprise by the University Budget Committee, and proved modestly successful in a very difficult situation. Early in 1998 some senior staff took early severance packages. Elam was invited to manage targeted expansion, and morale lifted noticeably.

**Reflections**

In retrospect, how did Elam people respond to the process used? Dunn (1997; 1998) reported that most were “highly complimentary” and regarded it as “very worthwhile”. Various data sources triangulate to support this view. Many, for example, expressed an intellectual and emotive delight in Phase 1 at the array of plural ideas concerning purpose that were offered and accepted as legitimate.

It was also interesting how diverse agendas were accommodated. The extended discussion about the proposal from some Design staff to have their specialisation added to Elam’s name caught a number of staff by surprise. One aspect of the surprise was that the rationale for the proposal was underdeveloped. Nevertheless, while resisted, the proposal was accommodated.

Few, however, were surprised by bitter attacks on the quality of buildings, and on attempts to open debates on Art critique; what one person described as the

“intellectual fascism of contemporary critique.” There were two forms of response. Both attacks were regarded as entertaining rituals, almost as period pieces, while insisting on the seriousness of the concerns they represented. On the other hand, especially with regard to the former issues, many laughed approvingly, respectfully, and indeed sympathetically, seeing the pressures induced by government policies and management ideologies as imminently worthy of stinging critique.

Most were enthusiastic and excited by the values revealed and reiterated by the process, such as care for students and the commitment by staff and students to Elam. There were many and regular intimations of high levels of ownership, particularly when section leaders presented their team’s cases during the transparent budgetary process. Some individual’s bear repetition here.

Sumich (1997) noted on the paradox of high levels of cooperative creativity and personal excellence, despite Elam’s reputation for unremitting struggle, turbulence and maverick behaviour. She cited three sets of current arrangements. Each student’s ‘Still Camera’ initial project each year straddles Photography and Intermedia. The Digital Subcommittee has Photography, Painting and Intermedia staff working together to resource the Digital course. Third, visiting speakers are regularly shared across all sections. She suggested that any myth of mindless and cantankerous individualism was inconsistent with these and other regular instances of cross-section cooperation. Keefe (1997) provided further evidence from her vantage point in the Library, insisting that, despite the constant and vigorous examination of ideas and occasional spectacular performance or incident, it was not at all unusual for Elam staff and students to work in highly motivated teams.

It is thus tentatively concluded that Elam suffered for its imagined as well as its real sins. It was seen from outside, and by a few within, as being near hopelessly divided. With spectacular exceptions, the deeper evidence is generally otherwise. As an earlier paper indicates, the Elam myth tends to confuse the contestation of ideas with interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics and to miss the presence of a virtue ethic that values independence, aesthetic excellence and educative forms of accountability.

Through a range of interventions and initiatives (Turner, 1997; Dunn, 1997), including the most recent events described above, the evidence is that Elam is improving its capacity to think and act collectively at a strategically crucial time. The decision to locate the School of Arts as a School in the Faculty of Architecture, Property and Planning, for financial management and human resource management reasons, adds to the other reasons for refining and advancing an Elam perspective, especially as additional interdisciplinary study and research is investigated at the post graduate level. The invitation in early 1998, to manage expansion, is widely regarded as a watershed in institutional support for Elam (Dunn, 1998).

The OD process described above is almost certain to continue. The Dean and Section Leaders continued to provide educative forms of leadership and an action research cycle in 1998 to prepare Elam's budget bid for 1999. They seemed to share the view that the rewards of collective planning and cohesive action for particular purposes can be gained without compromising the integrity of the primary social unit, the section, and its 'discipline'.

Despite a general acceptance that each 'discipline' will continue to be the primary source of academic identification in Elam, most also accept that strategic planning will have to be done at a more aggregated level to be competitively successful in the University of Auckland and, in particular, to release more favourable levels of institutional investment by raising revenues, controlling costs and carefully managing expansion.

Finally, the processes reported above also revealed issues that Elam staff continue to attend to. One is the rapidly intensifying external competition. An internal-external review of the MFA in 1998 has led to series of major improvements. Another is the degree of cross subsidisation coming to Fine Arts from other parts of the University, and how best to relate this situation to University investment priorities and the scale of unsatisfied demand. To conclude, this paper has shown that minor miracles are unlikely to be involved. With the death of the myth about Elam's incapacity to learn as a School, greater respect for its cooperative and creative problem-solving can be anticipated.

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