

BOOK REVIEW

Planning, Scheduling and Requirement Analysis. By Connie Hinson and Clifford P. McCue, Herndon, VA: National Institute of Governmental Purchasing, Inc., 2004, hard cover, ISBN: 1-932315-02-0, \$80.00.

In their book, *Planning, Scheduling and Requirement Analysis*, Connie Hinson, a procurement practitioner and educator, and Clifford McCue of Florida Atlantic University's School of Public Administration, set out with the ambitious dual objectives of "enhancing the strategic position" of the procurement function in organizations and "advancing the analytical capabilities of procurement professionals." For a variety of reasons, they do a far better job with the latter objective than the former. Hinson and McCue are most effective in those sections of the book that provide their readers with sound methodologies and proven templates for strategic planning. They move to less firm ground, and their arguments become less convincing, in those sections that exhort procurement to "become" strategic. There are of course several important reasons why procurement doesn't have a more powerful strategic position in public agencies, which the authors unfortunately never engage. More on this topic will be addressed later.

The authors intend for their book to interest and benefit a broad audience of public sector procurement professionals, and in general, they engage that audience successfully. The discussion leans toward state and local procurement agencies, rather than federal agencies. While the majority of the material is oriented toward procurement practitioners, scholars of public procurement will find sufficient conceptual content to hold their interest as well.

The title, *Planning, Scheduling and Requirement Analysis*, is somewhat misleading. More than half of the text is devoted to various topics related to strategy and strategic planning, and a significant portion of the remainder addresses requirements. Curiously, the topic of scheduling, though it appears in the book's title, is not explicitly treated. Thus, the book will disappoint readers who hope to find discussions of scheduling and planning methods, such as Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) and Critical Path Method (CPM), or software tools for scheduling such as Microsoft Project and Primavera.

The initial chapters of the book focus on "top-level" aspects of strategic planning. Chapter 1, "Strategy and Choice: Procurement's Involvement in Organizational Decision Making," presents the need for public procurement to be elevated to a more powerful strategic position. Chapter 2 gives an excellent overview of "Strategic Planning in the Public Sector," which will benefit any practitioners charged with developing or refining their agencies' strategic plans. Highlights of the chapter include: a model for strategic planning; several "real-world" examples of agency vision and mission statements, goals, and objectives; and an eight-step agenda for public sector strategic planning. Chapter 3, "Strategic Procurement Planning (SP²)," extends the concepts and methods of the preceding chapter to the realm of public procurement. Several more useful examples of procurement office mission, goals, and objectives statements are given. The chapter relies heavily on excellent materials from the Queensland State Government, which can serve as helpful templates for other procurement office strategic plans.

The remainder of the chapters addresses various topics related to planning. Chapter 4, "Linking Resource Allocation Decisions to the SP² Process," gives a worthwhile overview of public budgeting concepts and practices. The chapter would be much improved, however, with more explicit connections between budgeting and strategic planning. Chapter 5 deals with purchasing strategies, focusing specifically on requirements determination activities. The strength of this chapter lies in its discussion of various tools and methods, such as value analysis, inventory forecasting, and market analysis, that can provide insights into stakeholder requirements. Chapter 6, "Specifications," extends the discussion on requirements to give an excellent overview of specifications and their management.

Again, however, the chapter would benefit from more tangible connections between the topics of specifications and strategic planning. Chapter 7 provides the last substantive chapter with only a few pages on pricing strategies. Topics such as competition, supplier selection, and cost and price analyses are introduced. The brevity of treatment is unfortunate, since one would expect that topics like these would be most important in strategic procurement plans.

On balance, the book's contributions more than outweigh the occasional shortcomings of inadequate topical integration and uneven coverage. Public procurement professionals will find it an excellent resource that will help them to increase public procurement's value to their organizations – a goal that Hinson and McCue mention frequently throughout the text.

Returning to the book's dual objectives – enhancing procurement's position and advancing the analytical capabilities of its membership – Hinson and McCue apparently believe that accomplishing the latter will further the former. They assume that, as procurement professionals add value to their organizations through application of models and methodologies such as those in this book, they will be elevated to positions of importance at the organizational strategy-making table.

This solution is, however, a little too neat. Arguing that the procurement function has too often been left out of organizational planning and decision-making, and that the budgeting function has dominated in strategic planning, the authors bemoan the tendency to neglect procurement until plans have been made. Procurement enters the scene only as an implementer of plans. The authors assert that procurement's involvement during strategic planning would enable better plans and decisions. Hinson and McCue are of course “preaching to the choir” here. Any procurement professional who has had to live with the consequences of plans and decisions made without his or her input will shout “Amen!” to such arguments.

For procurement to gain a seat at the organizational strategy table, however, two conditions must exist: first, there must be a seat at that table for procurement; and second, the procurement professional must be willing and able to sit at that table. Hinson and McCue's book focuses almost exclusively on satisfying the second, probably easier, condition. Satisfying the first condition means that

those currently at the table – agency leaders in particular – must be willing to allow procurement to participate in strategy-making. There are of course many reasons why such a change would be problematic – for example, issues of power and organizational politics – but the authors deal with none of these. They apparently simply assume that those making strategy will welcome the contributions of procurement professionals.

Here is an example of this difficulty: Training and staffing the procurement function to carry out strategic planning require additional organizational resources. However, unless agency leaders and resource managers are convinced of the benefits that will result from those investments, they will resist procurement's involvement in strategic planning.

This points out a shortcoming in the authors' accomplishment of their objective of enhancing the procurement function's strategic position in organizations. They would have strengthened their case with a few real-world examples (such as the US Air Force's recent strategic purchasing successes with "commodity councils") that demonstrate tangible benefits of including procurement considerations in strategic planning. Absent such evidence, some of the authors' arguments and claims may strike non-procurement agency leaders as a little self-serving. Specifically, their statement that "procurement can no longer afford to remain in the resource allocation 'closet'" would have more weight, especially to an agency head, if it were reworded to "agencies can no longer afford to keep procurement in the resource allocation 'closet.'"

Finally, on a related note, the authors incompletely explore the range of skills and knowledge required by public procurement professionals to participate in strategic planning. Specifically, they ignore policy-making and its relationship to strategic procurement planning, especially as it pertains to requirements determination. While strategic planning is certainly useful in the public sector, it has its roots in private sector management. Arguably, what sets public procurement apart from private-sector procurement is its policy orientation. The rich body of public policy literature should have much to contribute to our understanding of the public procurement professional as one who legitimately participates in a range of organizational activities from the strategic tasks of policy formulation

(requirements) to the tactical tasks of policy implementation and evaluation.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, Hinson and McCue have produced a valuable text that makes a substantial contribution to the field. Their work establishes a solid foundation from which our concepts of the field may be advanced, and it elevates the sights of procurement practitioners to focus on higher levels of organizational and professional significance.

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