Planning and Management – the Most Neglected Activities in Lexicography

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Abstract: Lexicography has a long history of ineffective planning and inefficient management. This article applies the methods of general planning and management to the planning and management of a lexicographic unit.

Keywords: PLANNING, MANAGEMENT, MISSION STATEMENT, STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS, PERFORMANCE AREAS, SITUATIONAL DESCRIPTION, INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS, RESTRICTING FACTORS, SUPPORTING FACTORS, ENVIRONMENTAL TENDENCIES, SCENARIO, FUTURE STRATEGIC POSITION, GOALS, ACTION PLAN, PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT, MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.

Opsomming: Beplanning en bestuur — die mees verwaarloosde aktiwiteite in die leksikografie. Die leksikografie het 'n lang geskiedenis van oneffektiewe beplanning en ondoeltreffende bestuur. In hierdie artikel word die metodiek van algemene beplanning en bestuur toegepas op die beplanning en bestuur van 'n leksikografiese eenheid.

Sleutelwoorde: BEPLANNING, BESTUUR, MISSIESTELLING, STRATEGIESE FOKUSAREAS, PRESTASIEAREAS, SITUASIEBESKRYWING, INTERNE OMGEWING, EKSTERNE OMGEWING, OMGEWINGSANALISE, BEPERKENDE FAKTORE, ONDERSTEUNENDE FAKTORE, OMGEWINGSTENDENSE, SCENARIO, TOEKOMSTIGE STRATEGIESE POSISIE, DOELSTELLINGS, PLAN VAN AKSIE, PRODUKSIEBESTUUR, BESTUURSTELSEL.

1.   Introduction

When one considers the themes of papers delivered at national and international lexicographic conferences and congresses over the past decade, it is apparent that the planning and management of lexicographic projects is a theme which does not often arise. Visits to lexicographic projects confirm that planning and management are usually not very high on their agendas. The answer to a question such as: How can the work at a lexicographic project be accelerated?, is usually sought in areas other than in effective planning and management.

Zgusta's (1971: 348) statement: "I certainly do not know all lexicographic projects past and present; but of those I know not a single one was finished in the time and for the money originally planned", reveals a common shortcoming by lexicographic projects to plan their finances and time. A lack of planning by lexicographers and publishers is also confirmed by Landau (1984: 229): "Usually the publisher is ignorant as to what's involved in preparing a dictionary, and the lexicographer is quite irresponsibly optimistic." Both problems can be solved by good planning and management.

2.   What is planning?

Kroon et al. (1994: 125) states: "Planning can be defined as the management function that encompasses the purposeful consideration of the future objectives of an enterprise or part thereof, the means and activities involved and the drafting and implementing of a plan to make the efficient achievement of the objectives possible."

Planning is important for the following reasons (cf. Kroon et al. 1994 : 127):

— Planning helps to adapt to change and to reduce uncertainty,
— Planning focuses the enterprise's attention on its objectives,
— Planning improves performance and makes financial control possible,
— Planning guides managers' efforts,
— Planning is a prerequisite for control, and
— Planning ensures co-ordinated actions.

3.   What is strategic planning?

Strategic planning is "the continuous long-term planning process of especially top and middle management to continuously achieve the enterprise's goals by developing and implementing a suitable plan amidst environmental change" (Kroon et al. 1994: 169).

Strategic planning is an ongoing process. It is never completed, but should always be brought in line with changing demands facing the unit.

Although the responsibility for strategic planning lies with top and middle management, it is a good strategy to periodically involve the entire establishment in this task. This fosters a democratic spirit and focuses all those involved on the goals of the establishment.

4.   A framework for strategic planning

Strategic planning in general, and also with regard to lexicographic units, may be done in accordance with the following framework:

(a)   Mission statement
(b)   Strategic focus areas or performance areas
(c)   A historical overview
(d)   Situational description
        — The internal environment
        — The external environment
(e)   Environmental analysis
        — Restrictive factors (weak points) in the internal environment
        — Supportive factors (strong points) in the internal environment
(f)   Environmental tendencies
        — Restrictive factors (threats) in the external environment
        — Supportive factors (opportunities) in the external environment
(g)   Scenarios
(h)   Assumptions regarding the future strategic position of the unit
(i)   Goals
        — Long-term goals
        — Medium-term goals
        — Short-term goals or strategic objectives
(j)   Plan of action

It is self-evident that this framework may, with slight modifications, be utilized to plan a new as well as an existing lexicographic unit. This article will concentrate on the planning or replanning of an existing lexicographic unit. The role of each of the above-mentioned points in the planning process will briefly be discussed. Data from the strategic planning of the Bureau of the Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT) are used in one illustrative case.

5.   Strategic planning of a lexicographic unit

5.1   Mission statement

There is a reason for the existence of each lexicographic unit. This reason should find expression in the mission. The mission should also indicate the functions to be carried out by the unit. In the mission of the unit the endeavours of those involved and the task of the unit are embodied. The direction in which the unit wishes to go also needs to be clear from the mission.

An important question for a business enterprise is: *What is your business?* This question should be answered by the mission. The direction in which a lexicographic unit wishes to go in the long term is stated in the mission. The mission then guides the activities of the unit.

The mission of the Bureau of the WAT is to serve the Afrikaans language and language user as well as lexicography in general.

The following tasks result from this mission:

(a)   to continue with the compilation of the *WAT*, to complete it as soon as possible, and from time to time to improve the dictionary by

(i) the uninterrupted, representative and comprehensive collection, arrangement and storage in a lexicographically workable form of the vocabulary of the Afrikaans language in all its variations; and

(ii) the editing of the collected material according to scientifically established lexicographic principles in the form of an authoritative, user-friendly, synchronically explanatory dictionary in consecutive volumes;

(b)   to grant controlled access to the language material and sources of the Bureau to *bona fide* researchers and to answer linguistic enquiries;

(c)   to endeavour to establish appropriate lexicographic products for Afrikaans, but also for the other languages of South Africa, with the assistance of external authors;

(d)   to produce the *WAT* and these satellite publications cost-effectively;

(e)   to market these products dynamically and economically;

(f)   to act as a growth point and stimulus for lexicographic activities and metalexicographic thought;

(g)   to liaise with South African and foreign lexicographic and linguistic institutions with a view to exchanging lexicographic knowledge, information and publications;

(h)   to contribute to lexicographic theory and practice in the form of scientific publications;

(i)   to assist in raising the general level of lexicography, especially in Africa, through co-operation with external dictionary projects;

(j)   to play an active role in the rectification of inequalities on the terrain of lexicography through training and the creation of jobs;

(k)   to contribute to the establishment and development of South African lexicography in support of the aims of the Pan South African Language Board; and

(l)   to strive for need-directedness, quality and a unity of character in its activities and products.

5.2   Strategic focus areas or performance areas

Two important questions which should always be asked and answered at a lexicographic unit, are

(a)   Are the right things being done? and

(b)   Are the right things being done right?

A third question which can be added, is

(c)   Are the right things being done right at the right time?

Answering the first question directs the unit towards its focus or performance areas. The second question concerns, *inter alia*, those norms applicable to a unit, and the third question applies to target dates.

The mission of a unit guides it towards the identification of its focus areas. It is with respect to these focus areas that a unit should perform if it wishes to carry out its mission.

If a unit does not clearly identify all its focus areas, some of its responsibilities will be neglected, and if non-focus areas are added, unnecessary work will be done. Both these approaches will impact negatively on a unit.

The following areas, or at least some of them, form the focus areas of every lexicographic unit:

—   lexicographic needs assessment;
—   planning of the dictionary;
—   collection of language material;
—   editorial treatment of the material;
—   layout, printing and binding of the dictionary(-ies);
—   marketing;
—   research;
—   personnel;
—   finances;
—   support services, such as information and computer services; and
—   planning and management of the lexicographic unit.

Each of these areas requires specialized knowledge as well as skills to do detailed planning.

5.3   An historical overview

The successes and failures of a unit serves as a vital input during the unit's strategic planning. Therefore it is a good strategy to keep updating the history of the unit. It is important for a unit to build on the successes achieved and not to repeat the mistakes.

The availability and knowledge of the history of a unit, also its contemporary history, enable new colleagues to adapt more quickly to their work environment.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to carry a unit to new heights by planning and management if its past is completely ignored.

5.4   Situational description

It is important for good strategic planning to have a clear insight into the unit's situation at the time of the planning exercise. This situation is determined by the internal as well as the external environment.

The *internal environment* of a unit encompasses everything under its control. All other factors which may influence the unit, but over which it has no control, is considered to be part of the *external environment*, for example the political and economic conditions of a country.

· The state of each focus area in the internal environment as well as the influence of the external environment on the focus areas should be taken into account during the situational description.

The influence of changing conditions on the internal and external situation needs to be constantly monitored by management so that their possible effects on the planning of the unit do not go by unnoticed. The unit should be in a state of symbiosis with its internal and external environment, and the planning of the unit should maintain this symbiosis.

5.5   Environmental analysis

The welfare of a lexicographic unit depends to a large extent on management's ability to identify the strong and weak points in the internal environment and to act upon them.

The *weak points or restrictive factors* of a unit increase its vulnerability in a changing environment. Planning should aim to decrease or remove the effects of these weak points as far as possible. It should be management's strategy to transform weak points into strong points.

The *strong points or supportive factors* provide the unit with the opportunity to act proactively in order to ensure success. A unit's strong points form the basis on which it can confidently liaise with the outside world.

Those involved with a unit should not be afraid to identify its weak points during the analysis of its environment, since no recovery is possible unless an organization can identify its weaknesses. Involved parties should also, however, not be obsessed with the weak points of a unit, as such an obsession may eventually paralyse the unit completely.

Lexicographic units are very much like people, they are never so weak that they do not also have strong points.

5.6   Environmental tendencies

Tendencies in the external environment of a unit may pose threats or present opportunities to it. Each potential *threat or restrictive factor* should be identified,

analysed and handled. In this way risks to which the unit may be exposed, are decreased.

To a large extent, the success of a unit depends on the utilization of the *opportunities or supportive factors* in the external environment. A good grasp of the opportunities and the correct utilization thereof may contribute not only to the neutralization of threats, but also to increase the effectiveness of the unit.

The influence of threats and opportunities in the external environment on each focus area should always be taken into consideration. Here too, the strategy should be to transform threats into opportunities. Upon the analysis of a threat, it is often found that the correct utilization thereof holds a valuable opportunity. For example, political circumstances in a country may apply pressure on the future possibilities of a language, but such pressure may in turn stimulate the marketing of dictionary products.

5.7   Scenarios

Since all decisions have implications for the future of a unit, it is very important that those involved develop a feeling for the future within which the unit needs to function. The aim of a scenario is to construct the future within which the unit needs to fulfil its role as accurately as possible. During such a construction of this future, the past and present situation as well as linguistic and lexicographic tendencies may serve as a valuable input. From such a scenario, the unit may obtain an indication of the challenges awaiting it, as well as the effects which current decisions may have in the future. A scenario is the outcome of a reflection on the future and the influence which the future may have on the unit. A scenario enables the decision-makers of the unit to evaluate anticipated consequences of decisions in a critical manner.

The more turbulent the external environment becomes, the more difficult it is to develop a scenario which maintains its validity over a longer period of time. In turbulent circumstances a scenario may be developed for a shorter period of time, e.g. three or five years. It then needs to be evaluated on an ongoing basis with the aim of adapting or revising it.

It may be a good exercise to anticipate a more negative future than the formulated scenario suggests and then to do contingency planning on this basis. To a large extent the veracity of the scenario depends on the vision of those who develop the scenario, and developing scenarios in turn sharpens the vision of those involved.

The original meaning of the term *scenario* refers to a summary or sketch of the story-line or plot of a drama, providing details about the scenes, situations, etc. A scenario of a unit should encompass those future aspects which may influence the focus areas of the unit.

5.8   Assumptions regarding the future strategic position of a unit

Planning is always directed to the future. Since the future is unknown, assumptions are necessary in addition to scenarios in order to obtain a feeling for the future. Assumptions are made regarding the position of the unit at a certain point in the future. This point may be set three or five years in the future and be referred to as the future strategic position. This refers to the position where the unit wants to be at a certain time in the future.

The assumptions made should be guided by the mission of the unit and assumptions also need to be made for all focus areas. Assumptions need to be supported by what has been achieved by the enterprise in the past, by its current situation and level of development, as well as by the vision of those involved. In short, all information generated by the strategic planning exercise up to the present time should be considered when making assumptions.

The better the strategic planning is done and the more experience those involved have in making assumptions, the more realistic the assumptions will appear once the original future strategic position is reached. It is self-evident that this position always moves forward in time, and therefore new assumptions need to be made constantly. If the assumptions are utilized correctly, it may be a valuable guide to management. Realistic scenarios and planning assumptions make proactive management possible and restrict reactive management, the latter usually being a sign of crisis management.

5.9   Goals

Given all the information available at this stage of the planning exercise, it becomes much easier to formulate goals than it would be without such information. Goals need to guide the unit towards the right accomplishment of the right tasks at the right time. Under such circumstances the unit will be an efficient and effective organization.

A unit needs short-term, medium-term and long-term goals to steadily guide it to its final goal. The *long-term goals* need to guide a unit during its entire existence. *Medium-term goals* for the next three or five years need to be derived from the long-term goals. During this process, assumptions about the future strategic position can play a vital supporting role. The *short-term goals or strategic objectives* for each year are derived from the medium-term goals.

In this way, a framework of objectives and goals can be developed, guiding the unit in a planned and organized manner.

Once the strategic goals for the next year have been formulated, they need to be prioritized. The prioritization of goals for the unit as a whole and for its subsections need to be done separately. Priority goals should then be opera-

tionalized so that those involved may be clear as to the activities flowing from each goal. This serves as a valuable input for costing and for drawing up a target budget.

5.10   Plan of action

Planning is of no use unless it is implemented; therefore action plans need to be drawn up and staff need to be organized to carry out these plans. Should this not take place, planning is experienced as a useless and time-consuming activity, discrediting the entire planning exercise.

An action plan is incomplete unless it also contains the names of those to carry out the plans as well as the target dates at which the plans need to be carried out. Target dates should be set in such a way that the unit as a whole steadily reaches its goals.

6.   Management of a lexicographic unit

Planning is a management function, and therefore it is not only management's task to ensure that planning is done, but also its responsibility to see to it that action plans are carried out and that planning is implemented. Control should be exercised to see to it that planning is correctly implemented and the outcome needs to be evaluated in order to establish whether the desired results are obtained. If so, the implementation of the planning may continue, or else the planning needs to be revised.

6.1   Production management

The primary goal of management at a lexicographic unit should be to create working and other conditions enabling those involved to produce high quality output. Such output should not only be delivered sporadically, but constantly.

From all the activities of the unit, it should be clear that management places a high premium on productivity. Production should be encouraged and performance should be rewarded. Productivity cannot be increased responsibly unless it can be measured. Production norms are necessary for the measurement of productivity.

There is often the view at lexicographic units that the production of lexicographers is not measurable. Where the measurement of productivity does indeed occur, the emphasis is virtually exclusively on input, e.g. how many citations are processed annually, whereas little attention is paid to output. For the manager, output is a valuable management mechanism. During the management process, output needs to be controlled and evaluated. It is of more value to the manager to know the monthly average number of manuscript

pages delivered per lexicographer than to know how many citations were processed. As soon as the average output of the staff becomes predictable to a certain extent, the calculation of target dates and supporting resources needed becomes much easier.

6.2   A management system

Since a unit's performance needs to be managed, the manager should select or develop a management system by means of which performance can be managed. The performance of the unit as a whole is related to the completion of its action plans and the realization of its goals. The realization of goals needs to be managed as a whole so that the various sections of a unit do not move ahead of one another, but that the unit as a whole reaches its goals at the planned times.

Such a management system is known as an integrated performance management system and delivers good results when managing a lexicographic unit.

7.   Conclusion

Planning does not guarantee the success of a lexicographic unit, particularly when such planning is not managed effectively. A lack of good planning and effective management is guaranteed to squander time and money.

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