Chapter One

The Challenges of
Planning Practice

Planning is the guidance of future action. In a world of intensely conflicting interests and great inequalities of status and resources, planning in the face of power is at once a daily necessity and a constant ethical challenge.

This book is about planning for people in a precariously democratic but strongly capitalistic society. As we will see, the structure of the economy organizes autonomy and independence for some people, powerlessness and dependency for others. Planners do not work on a neutral stage, an ideally liberal setting in which all affected interests have voice; they work within political institutions, on political issues, on problems whose most basic technical components (say, a population projection) may be celebrated by some, contested by others. Any account of planning must face these political realities.

Planning can take many forms. An environmental planner may draft regulations to protect air and water quality or public parklands. A land-use planner may work more as a generalist, reviewing a real estate developer's proposal in the morning and drawing up an open-space plan in the afternoon. A health planner may assess community needs for improved prenatal care or for new diagnostic technologies, and then work to meet these needs without encouraging wasteful, however privately lucrative, oversupply. Their labels aside, each of these planners will remind us that they plan for people. This book explores the practice of planning and

assesses the practicalities and difficulties, the challenges and opportunities that are presented by the pursuit of the public good·in many arenas of modern society.

Notice that planners who seek to meet public needs face even greater challenges than their more romanticized private-sector counterparts, the corporate "strategic" planners. For publicly oriented planners need to worry not only about waste but also about social justice; they need to worry not only about efficiency but also about decent outcomes; they need to worry not only about satisfied customers but also about the food, housing, and jobs the perfect market promises and the actual market fails to provide. Compared to the job that public-sector planners have, the planner with private-sector clients has it easy.

Throughout the book, we refer to "planners" as a shorthand for a broad array of future-oriented actors, including project and program managers, public administrators, program evaluators, and policy analysts, as well as local, regional, state, and federal agency planners, both urban and rural. Thus, this book explores the vocation of planning for public well-being or, to put it more traditionally, for social welfare and social justice.

The vocation of planning has often been misunderstood in two ways, however, and this book attempts to provide an alternative to those views. Planning has sometimes been understood either as a technical problem-solving endeavor or (somewhat the opposite) as purely a matter of the hustle, bustle, and nastiness of politics. These images of planning have aspects of truth to them—there are often *both* technical and political dimensions to planners' work—but such stereotypes poorly capture the realities of planning practice. That practice is both far more complex and far more fascinating than these images suggest.

Planners work on problems, with people. The problem-work is potentially technical, but it may often be more craft-like or routine; the people-work is always political, sometimes explicitly so, at other times not. As the problems planners work on vary, from health-planning cases to natural-resource management to financial planning, the necessary techniques and technical skills required to address those problems vary as well. Likewise, the people-work that planners do will also vary from the local to the federal level, from voluntary organizations to public agencies, from administra-

tive to staff positions, and so on. But nevertheless, a recurrent set of practical, organizational, and political issues confronts planners of all kinds, and this book is about those issues. Consider several briefly.

In a world of poor information and limited time to work on problems, how are careful analyses of alternative futures possible? In a world of conflicting interests—defined along lines of class, place, race, gender, organization, or individuals—how are planners to make their way? In a society structured by a capitalist economy and a nominally democratic political system, how are planners to respond to conflicting demands when private profit and public well-being clash? When planners are mandated to enable "public participation" even as they work in bureaucratic organizations that may be threatened by such participation, what are planners to do? When "solving" problems depends in large part on the interests, perceptions, commitments, and understanding of others, how can planners best convey their ideas, show what is consequential, expose dangers, and open up fruitful opportunities for action?

In planning practice, talk and argument matter. A rigorous analysis that no one can understand can be worse than useless—it can be counterproductive and damaging, just as it might also at other times serve deliberately to obfuscate important issues. The planner's knowledge of the organizational world matters, too, for a good idea presented the week after a crucial meeting (or too late on an agenda, or on the wrong agenda) will no longer do any good. The planner's ability to anticipate conflict matters, for without an appreciation of structured interests, economic motives, and organizational defensiveness, planners may present rational analyses to politicians, developers, citizen groups, and other agencies and then be bewildered when no one seems to listen, at least not to the merits of the case. This book focuses on these problems to explore the ways planners can anticipate obstacles and respond practically, effectively, in ways that nurture rather than neglect—but hardly guarantee—a substantively democratic planning process.

This book is organized in five parts, including a supplement on planning education.[1] Part One asks how we understand and risk significantly misunderstanding what planners and policy analysts really do. Part Two takes on the problems of power and rationality in planning practice: How can planners act politically, anticipating

relations of power, and act rationally nonetheless? Part Three
turns to the organizational contexts in which planners work: If or-
ganizations are not well-ordered mechanisms to achieve goals, if
indeed conflicts are rampant and confront planners every day,
what are planners to do? Part Four examines two activities that are
central to planning but have nevertheless received far less attention
than they deserve: the practical and critical work of listening and
that of designing. Throughout, of course, the political and prac-
tical character of planning remains central. Part Five then presents
a synthetic theoretical framework that links the arguments encom-
passing conceptions of practice and power, rationality and organi-
zation, conflict and its mediation, intervention and design. Finally,
to explore a sorely neglected area of study, the Supplement on
Planning Education provides an analysis of an innovative experi-
ment in the teaching of planning practice. Consider now each of
these parts briefly in turn.

Perhaps because I studied planning after receiving a master's
degree in mechanical engineering, I was puzzled by claims that
planners were "problem-solvers." When I studied environmen-
tal planners in the course of my dissertation research, technical
problem-solving seemed to be just one small part of the planners'
multifaceted work. A few planners did focus primarily on tech-
nical problems, as did some consultants' staff, but most of them
did not. Although the technical problem-solving image of planning
appeals to a sense of scientific legitimacy, it really sells planning
practice short.

But if technical problem-solving was not an accurate description
or metaphor that fit actual planning practice, what was? What
about the essential and perplexing place of value judgment, ac-
countability, the power of information, political bias, the struc-
tural political-economic setting, the (symbolic?) promises of pub-
lic participation? Neither Charles Lindblom's solution (describing
planners and administrators as disjointed incrementalists) nor
Herbert Simon's formulation (describing decision-makers' lower-
ing of expectations when faced with constraints) began really to
face these problems. Beginning to account for the political rich-
ness, the practical judgments, and the complexity of planning
practice is the task of the first two chapters, Part One, of this book.

Part Two argues that to be rational in practice, planners must be

able to think and act politically—not to campaign for candidates, but to anticipate and reshape relations of power and powerlessness. Only if the practical context of power relations, conflicting wants and interests, and political-economic structures are assessed clearly can planners respond to real needs and problems in anything approaching an actually rational, if not textbook-like, way. Even the most factual information, for example, can mean different things in different contexts, in different institutional settings; and the planner who writes or speaks as if these settings do not matter is likely to fail miserably, to be misunderstood, to be seen as unresponsive, self-isolating, insensitive to the needs of others.

Furthermore, as Simon and Lindblom have made vividly clear, the planner or administrator who fails to appreciate institutional constraints will overreach and underachieve—and will be ineffective, if only because time and resources are always scarce, organizationally allocated, forcing bounds upon the practitioner's analysis. Ignoring the opportunities and dangers of an organizational setting is like walking across a busy intersection with one's eyes closed.

How can planners practically anticipate the shifting influences of the institutional and informational environment in which they work? In different situations, different strategies will be required. Chapter Three shows how the control of information is a source of power in the planning process. How might a "progressive planner," concerned with responding to structural sources of power and inequality, handle information any differently from planners less attentive to the biases of the structural settings in which they act every day?

Chapter Four provides a practical, political reformulation of Herbert Simon's seminal notion of bounded rationality. Distinguishing several ways that planning practice may be constrained or bounded, this analysis suggests a corresponding range of planning strategies to be used in differently constrained settings. Thus, this chapter provides a strategic account of what has recently been called "contingency planning." Only when we understand that it is quite rational to plan differently under different conditions can we then avoid the embarrassment of thinking and saying that our planning may be rational in principle (or "in theory"), yet anything but rational in practice.

Part Three examines problems of power and conflict in the organizational settings in which planners work. How do those settings provide the stages on which planners act? What should planners expect from their organizational environments? When faced with conflicts of many sorts, what can planners do? When planners must negotiate to defend particular interests, yet must act in some ways like mediators between conflicting publics as well, what can they do? What possibilities are suggested by current planning experience?

Planning organizations are, of course, constrained, but the planning process also recreates relations of political power: Some people get timely information and others do not; some gain access to informal and formal sources of power and some do not; some voices are organized and may be influential, whereas others are excluded and may remain silent and ineffectual. Whether in the public or private sector, organizations are not egalitarian utopias; differences of status, power and authority, information and expertise, interests and desires abound. Those realities—including the incompetent manager, the arrogant section head, the misinformed staff analyst, the fight between developer and regulator—cannot be wished away. Given such problems of daily work, what can be done? What can planners do? To address these issues, Chapter Five compares three views of the settings in which planners work: an instrumental, a social, and a reproductive view. Only the reproductive perspective begins adequately to account for the messiness of organizational life and for the ways in which planning organizations recreate themselves and broader relations of status, knowledge, and power as well.

Chapter Six explores how planners do what some theorists and practitioners claim cannot be done: simultaneously mediating between conflicting parties while negotiating as an interested party themselves. This chapter discusses the settings in which many local planning disputes arise, strategies that planners can adopt in response, and the problems—emotional, political, and administrative—that must be faced in turn. Issues of power are particularly important to set out clearly: Must planners who adopt mediated negotiation approaches co-opt weaker parties? Can planners at times empower such parties through these negotiation processes?

In a world of severe inequalities, planning strategies that treat all

parties "equally" end up ironically reproducing the very inequal-
ities with which they began. Nowhere is this paradox of "equal
opportunity" more obvious and poignant than in apparently demo-
cratic, participatory planning processes—in which initial inequal-
ities of time, resources, expertise, and information threaten to
render the actual democratic character of these processes problem-
atic, if not altogether illusory. Throughout the book we ask what
planners, when they are so inclined, might do to foster more genu-
inely democratic politics in their communities.

Part Four turns more directly to questions of skill and practice. It
investigates the central activities of listening and designing. Even
though planners may often have little formal authority, they influ-
ence decision-making processes in several subtle ways. We have a
great deal to learn from the ways planners listen to some concerns
but ignore others, call attention to these issues but neglect or de-
emphasize those, time what information they give to whom, and
so shape other people's expectations, hopes, and fears.

Chapter Seven focuses on a critical but widely neglected aspect
of planning practice: the daily challenges of sensitive and critical
listening in the face of possibilities for future action. Not only es-
sential to any investigation of "what is to be done," skillful listen-
ing is also a particularly practical interpretive activity. It is funda-
mentally important in those typical planning situations where
issues and statements are ambiguous, where social conflict is the
order of the day, and where participants' senses of issues and inter-
ests are fluid as well. This chapter reaches beyond planning prac-
tice to show how our work of listening well or poorly shapes the
actual social policy of our everyday lives. Such listening in practice
involves not simply having good intentions and hearing words, but
also embodying respect, paying attention, employing critical judg-
ment, and building relationships.

Chapter Eight explores the work of designing as a deeply social,
communicative process. In this view, designing is not simply a
matter of mastery and intuition. It is also a process in which social
actors such as planners, architects, and clients seek to "make sense
together" quite practically. This common creation of sense lies at
the core of the social process of designing: giving meaningful form
to a building, a park, a project, a program that is recognizable, co-
herent, significant, and realizable by a variety of interested parties.

In project-review negotiations in a local planning office, for example, planners and architects come to shared understandings as they review plans, criticize working drawings, and search for alternatives that promise better results—functionally, aesthetically, or politically. The design of the project evolves not only in the architect's or planner's mind, but more so in the shared sketches and drawings and proposals they can review and agree on together. What evolves is not simply an abstract form but a socially constructed offer or proposal that grows from a history of practical, working conversations that link interested parties. This "socially constructivist" notion of planning practice, and design practices more broadly, enables us to respect the intuitive aspects of the creation of form and also to appreciate the thoroughly social and indeed political character of the communicative process through which any working design is achieved.

The first four parts of the book, then, treat an interrelated set of problems. Planners must have not only technical but also political skills—but what does this mean (Part One)? What relations of power must they be able to anticipate? How can planners acknowledge the messy, political character of their work and yet be rational (Part Two)? What must planners know about the organizational environments in which they work? In complex settings, how can planners deal with diverse conflicts while not perpetuating inequalities of information, expertise, and power (Part Three)? How can we understand the political and practical aspects of the careful listening that planners must do? What of the political and practical dimensions of designing in a social world (Part Four)? These first four parts of the book thus argue that planning can be technical and political at once, attuned to power and rationality at the same time, interpretively critical and pitched to counteract needless suffering as well.

Having set out these arguments about planning practice, can we develop a framework to help us connect and clarify these central problems? Part Five attempts to develop such a framework. Chapter Nine builds on recent critical social theory to develop an accessible and politically sensitive account of planning practice that meets three challenges. First, such an account must do justice to the real, messy settings in which planning takes place. Second, it must embrace the everyday experiences of planners and make

sense of their perceptions of the complexities, uncertainties, and ambiguities of daily practice. Third, it must explicitly address normative questions of information distortion, manipulated participation, legitimation, and ideological versus legitimate exercises of power. A critical account of planning practice—as the selective, communicative organizing or disorganizing of attention—points immediately to such questions: to the practical contexts of planning and the communicative, contingently meaningful character of planners' actions; to both the political staging and the dimensions of planners' arguments; and to the advantages of the organized and the vulnerabilities of the unorganized.

Chapter Nine argues not only that the day-to-day work of planners is fundamentally communicative, but also that the organizational and structural staging of that work is contingently historical and political-economic. Most previous accounts of planning have focused either at the micro-level, thus diverting attention from social and political structure, or at the macro-level, thus diverting attention from social and political action, daily practice. Chapter Nine argues that critical social theory allows us to integrate these levels of analysis. Furthermore, although previous accounts of planning and administrative behavior dealt poorly, if at all, with normative questions or problems of ideology, the critical-communicative account of planning advanced here makes such issues central: At stake in such a theory of planning is our recognition not only of planners' potential efficacy and influence but of their possible political functions and problematic legitimacy as well. Any theory that helps us to recognize these problems should also suggest what is to be done, and Chapter Nine seeks to work in that direction, though inevitably without providing recipes or guarantees.

How, one might wonder, can such a complex political and ethical practice be taught? The Supplement on Planning Education (Chapter Ten) explores a seriously neglected area of research: the practical difficulties of teaching practitioners, and the lessons to be learned from this experience. The supplement accordingly provides an in-depth look at an innovative and experimental course taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) on "Planning and Institutional Processes." Because this course drew together leading faculty-practitioners to assess and evaluate their

professional practice in the classroom—as students explored various facets of that practice—this supplement affords a rare glimpse at the intersection of research, teaching, and practice.

The supplement begins by reviewing four case studies that challenged students and faculty alike to think through issues of growth controls and public participation, racism and community development, organizational learning and politics, and environmental mediation and associated problems of power. This supplement reviews the four case studies critically and also assesses pressing issues that promise to confront planning faculty, students, and practitioners in the future.

In sum, a critical theory of planning is no panacea. It is neither dogma, doctrine, nor a quick conceptual fix for timeless problems, a cookbook recipe for planning practice that truly serves the public. The critical theory of planning practice formulated here must be further tested: Can it help students of planning, in schools or in agencies, to recognize more clearly and act on the precarious possibilities of effective, ethically sensitive, politically astute planning practice?

It is true, of course, that theories do not solve problems in the world; people do. Nevertheless, good theory is what we need when we get stuck. Theories can help alert us to problems, point us toward strategies of response, remind us of what we care about, or prompt our practical insights into the particular cases we confront. In that spirit, Chapter Nine in particular seeks to capture the essential aspects of a critical understanding of planning practice. If this book goes even halfway toward such ends and stimulates others to carry out critical work that goes still further, perhaps both theory and practice will improve.

Finally, this book makes no foolish claim to completeness. It claims neither the presumptuous truth of having offered the last word on its subject nor the illusory, detached objectivity that so often leads not to freedom from bias but to misunderstanding and irrelevance. Instead, these chapters claim strong plausibility: that in broad realms of planning and administrative practice, these arguments about roles, power, rationality, organizational context, and practical strategies of intervention *fit,* that these arguments can enrich both our understanding and our practice of planning, policy analysis, and administration.

These arguments complement, rather than substitute for, other important analyses that must be done. Planning in the face of power is work by real people in real situations, but people vary and so do the contexts of their actions. The psychological dimensions of planning practice are not extensively treated here, and they demand attention. Likewise, structural political-economic forces that stage day-to-day practice are often referred to, but they are not systematically assessed in the chapters that follow; these forces also demand more attention. Thus, while this book provides an analysis of practice that is both general in its reach and practical in its focus, it does not present comparative analyses of different domains of planning and administrative practice.

Nevertheless, psychological, structural, and comparative analyses depend in turn on fundamental notions not only of what planning and administrative practitioners now do, but also of what they may yet do, may better do, in the messy and conflictual, the constrained, promising, and painful situations in which they work. As one stimulus to further work, then, this book attempts to present a pragmatic but political account of planning practice. Criticisms of these arguments must carry further the psychological, structural, and comparative analyses that will teach us about the possibilities of planning in the face of power.

What, finally, is new here? By developing an argumentative account of planning practice in which planners play a variety of roles, this book argues against several of the old oppositions and dichotomies in the field. Rationality and politics, incrementalism and radicalism, individual action and structural constraints, planners' discretion and established power: These may be distinguished in theory, but they must be integrated in any progressive planning practice. Many analyses suggest the various roles that practitioners may play, or the limits to citizens' participation, or the political-economic stacking of the democratic deck. This book seeks to integrate and build upon these lines of argument and show just what public-serving planning practitioners can do nevertheless—not in theory but in practice, in an organizationally messy world of political inequality and economic exploitation, and in response to Paul Goodman's continually nagging practical question, "Now what?"

What Do Planning Analysts Do? Planning and Policy Analysis as Organizing

We know that planning analysts are not simply problem-solvers, but we do not know what they really do. We still need an account of what the practice of planning analysis is all about. By "planning analysts" I refer to a family of roles that involve deliberation about proper courses of action: evaluators, policy analysts, planners, administrators, and managers. To understand these practitioners as technical problem-solvers or information-processors would be misleading at best. We would do better, this chapter argues, to understand planning analysts as selective organizers of attention to real possibilities of action. This attention-organizing view can describe what analysts do as well as suggest the distinctive ethical responsibilities and opportunities analysts face in their daily work. Before we turn directly to this argument, let us consider the limits of two common accounts of what planning analysts do.

Two Conventional Theories

One widely held cultural view treats planning as technical problem-solving: Given goals or ends, planners are to figure out the best means to achieve them. A second view borrows from varieties of systems theory and treats planning as a means of processing information and feedback. Both views are appealing, but neither may

be true to the realities of practice, as many students of planning have noted.[1]

When we look at the day-to-day work of putting out brushfires, dealing with "random" telephone calls, debating with other staff, juggling priorities, bargaining here and organizing there, trying to understand what in the world someone else (or some document) means, the first, means-ends, view quickly comes to be a tempting but inadequate reconstruction of what actually goes on. We might like to think that a straightforward rationale or goal justifies every action, but justifications are so diverse, so varying and wide-ranging, that no simple (and certainly no formal) overall end helps us explain what planning analysts do. Saying that environmental analysts or planners are working to "preserve environmental quality" does not tell us much about what they really do. Do they protect neighborhoods from disruptive development? Do they "preserve environmental quality" at the cost of slowing housing construction for those who need it? Do they enhance or thwart widespread public participation? To say with hindsight that planners and evaluators "assess or shape reasonable means to organizational or legislated goals" gives us more ambiguity than insight.

In contrast, the second, information-processing, view does bring us closer to day-to-day work in settings where problems are well defined, where goals and measures of success are clear, where cooperation between participants is extensive, and where we know clearly what an "error signal" is. But the opposite situation is more typical: Problems, outcomes, and even programs and outputs are usually not well defined; goals and outcome measures are ambiguous and conflicting; participants are often in conflict and may withhold cooperation; and "error" or "success" is not so obvious—what to settle for is half the problem.

Clearly, planning analysts do much more than "process feedback" to decision-makers. As they formulate problems, analysts preempt decision-makers; they define and select the feedback as well as process it. They watch for new opportunities. They face uncertainties that are anything but well defined and that cannot be routinely monitored. The "systems" and networks within the analysts' organization are fluid, as are those connecting analysts to outsiders. Problems shift, new people are contacted, goal state-

ments change, program strategies shift. Planning analysts are more than navigators who keep their ships on course: They are necessarily involved with formulating that course.[2] Analysts do more than inform the players and orchestrate; they are inevitably involved politically in writing the score as well. The information-processing image of practice abstractly models systems behaviors as "self-regulating," but it does not help us understand or explain everyday practice and action. As one student of politics commented pointedly, social systems—the systems in and on which planners and policy analysts work—are no more politically self-regulating than the Bastille was self-storming (Winner 1977).

Neglected Dimensions of Practice

In complex political situations, planning analysts need to pose and create problems as much as to analyze them. They resolve problems less by calculation ("solving" them) and more by creating them anew, reformulating them so action and strategy are possible, sensible, and agreeable in the case at hand. Given complex problems, analysts often cannot provide either formal analyses or "all the facts." In addition to presenting any "facts," they also practice the art of the possible: They work to create new program possibilities, and they shape attention selectively to *these* program-design options and inevitably neglect others.

In a political world analysts often need to marshal not only information and data but also support. They are coalition builders as well as information accumulators. Because they have to shape the expectations of elected officials, neighbors, developers, and others, planning analysts cannot just render detached, distant analyses. The analysts need to be close to these people, close enough to understand them and to communicate effectively with them. Such contact need not lead to biased analyses. *Criticism is requisite to objectivity; detachment is not.* Objective and solid analysis may help persuade potential coalition members; detachment may simply produce irrelevance.[3]

To get information they need, analysts may require not computer access as much as a network of trusted contacts and self-interested cooperation, even if such cooperation is not always benign. If planning analysis were mechanical and not deeply politi-

cal, information technology alone might be the top priority. As it stands, though, communications networks, formal and informal, are often more important, for without them information itself would be meaningless.

In addition, a set of questions may be far more effective in shaping action than a report, especially in day-to-day practice. What "flows" in the analyst-other interaction is not simply information, but responsibility—and the ability to respond—as well. When goals are vague, the environment unstable and uncertain, opportunities yet to be clearly recognized, and significant facts still obscure in conflicting stories, spreading questions can be as important for planning analysts as marshaling facts or processing information about a case.

Why Are Analysts Effective at All?

The planner's sources of influence include specialized knowledge or technical expertise, a monopoly on organizationally and politically relevant information, and the role of "gatekeeper" of information and access. Specialization may indeed inform the choice of means, once ends are given; information is both a political and a technical resource. Yet many other sources of analysts' effectiveness and power exist: widespread contacts; formal or informal bureaucratic and political pressure; bargaining with bureaucratic cooperation or possible delays; managing uncertainty and shaping images of the future; preempting definitions of problems and thus approaches to solutions; alerting, warning, or working with outsiders (or insiders); coalition building; and selectively calling attention to particular opportunities or threats.[4] We explore such sources of influence further in Chapters Three and Four. To assess these avenues or strategies of analysts' power and influence, however, we need another image and understanding of what planning analysts do.

Organizing Attention to Possibilities

Consider the planner or the public administrator who provides information to a neighborhood (or constituency) organization about a proposed project. A public works administrator may inform a

local merchants' association about a street-widening project likely to disrupt traffic and pedestrian access to local businesses. A local planner may inform community residents about an apartment complex proposed for their neighborhood. In either case the planner or administrator is unlikely to telephone interested parties and simply say, "Hello. A street widening (or an apartment building) is being proposed near you. Hear? Goodbye."

Instead, the planner or administrator is likely to *describe* the proposed project; *indicate* the possible timing; *designate* sources of further information; *explain* the project review process; *alert* the neighborhood residents to their possible participation; *point out* possible alternatives that are being or might be considered; *specify* requirements for citizen participation, such as submitting written comments or paying appeal fees; *suggest* other interested parties who might be contacted; *notify* residents of particular meetings to discuss the proposed project; and *ask* for comments and responses to the proposals as they now stand. In these ways, planners and administrators shape not only facts but attention. Doing more than listing data, they deliberately call attention to both "the facts" ("The proposal just came in yesterday: I contacted you as soon as I could") and to future possibilities ("You might raise those questions at the meeting next week").

Simply to say that analysts provide information is correct, but not terribly helpful. *How* do they provide information, and what practical, political, and ethical difference can they make? The analysts' talk matters. When they speak, analysts act: they notify, inform, alert, point out, designate, ask, warn, and so on.[5] In asking for citizens' responses to proposals, analysts also shift responsibility to others and shape their participation, thus organizing (or disorganizing) attention both to project alternatives and to possibilities of action.[6] So analysts are not apolitical problem-solvers or social engineers. Instead, they are actually pragmatic critics who must make selective arguments and therefore influence what other people learn about, not by technically calculating means to ends or error signals, but by *organizing attention* carefully to project possibilities, organizing for practical political purposes and organizational ends.[7]

When analysts trust the reports and warnings of other staff

members, citizens, or friends, they subtly shift responsibility to those others and come to depend on them. Thus analysts protect good working relationships with other agencies, not just to get accurate information but also to cultivate trusted networks of contacts who can be counted on to respond sensitively, appropriately, and quickly. Planning analysts transmit facts, but they also shape relationships, political ties, and others' attention, thus shaping not only others' thinking but their concerns and participation, too.[8]

Practice and Politics

Once we recognize the organizing and attention-shaping strategies of planning analysts, we can make sense of much of the apparent noise of daily work: the endless meetings that socialize and co-opt no less than disseminate information, the persistent ring of the telephone, and—instead of others' willingness to reason together— the staff member's worry, the supervisor's pressure, the neighborhood resident's disgruntlement, the client's anger or confusion heard on the other end of the telephone, if not face-to-face. An attention-organizing view clarifies the politics of planning analysis as the means-ends and information-processing views do not.[9]

Goals and information are important, but they are not givens to work with or toward. They are practical and political problems to be formulated, reinterpreted, continually reevaluated and reconstructed. How analysts organize attention is the central political problem of their practice. They must stress some issues and downplay others. They clarify some opportunities but obscure others. They encourage the participation of some citizens, but not that of others. They open up particular practical questions, but they close off the discussion of others. Inescapably and subtly, then, planning analysts focus citizens' attention selectively. They organize attention to some possibilities while disorganizing attention to still other options. To ask how analysts organize or disorganize others' attention leads not only to questions about the adequacy, legitimacy, and openness of their practice but also to the same questions about the organizations in which they work—issues the conventional views seem to ignore, as if feedback flows and goals were unambiguous, clearly defined targets. The conventional views

promise security at the price of denying the reality of politics.[10] The organizing, attention-shaping view provides both sources of practical strategy and political vision as well.

Implications for Daily Practice

Consider several implications of this general account of planning practice.[11] First, note that the planning analysts' daily actions are practically communicative—creating, reconstituting, reformulating problems as well as simply reporting on them. An analyst's question put to a building developer, the drafting of a section of an evaluation or impact report, even alerting a neighborhood organization to a forthcoming meeting—these are not only means to ends, but they are also communicative actions that build relationships, open possibilities, and shape others' interpretations of meaning and opportunity, of "I can" or "I can't." Revealing the deepest but nevertheless ordinary possibilities here, Stephen Blum has often characterized the work of planning as "the organization of hope."[12]

As analysts shape arguments, they can broaden rather than preempt the bases of policy formulation. Their ability to speak and write effectively—to argue cogently in a political world—is crucial. Rhetoric, the classical art of speech and persuasion, not sophistry, counts.

Second, planning analysts' organizations are not problem-solving machines with simple inputs and outputs. They are structures of power and thus of distorted communication—they selectively channel information and attention, systematically shape participation, services, and (often problematic) promises. Every organization reproduces a world of promise, hope, expectation, frustration, dependence, and trust, just as it may shape the natural or material world.

Third, the ethical and political responsibilities of planning analysts now appear in a new light. Because their actions are not only instrumental, the implicit responsibility of planning analysts can no longer simply be to "be efficient," to function smoothly as neutral means to given and presumably well defined ends. Analysts work in complex, conflict-ridden political worlds. So they must speak and listen, ask and answer, act practically and commu-

nicatively within multilayered structures of variously distorted communications, claims and counterclaims, promises and predictions. Under these constrained conditions, the responsibility of planning analysts is *not* to work toward the impossible perfection of "fully open communications." It is to work instead toward the correction of the *needless* distortions, some systematic and some not, that disable, mystify, distract, and mislead others: to work toward a political democratization of daily communications.[13] For example, seen as organizers or disorganizers, analysts become responsible for the parts they can play to prevent and correct false promises; to correct misleading expectations; to eliminate clients' unnecessary dependency; to create and nurture hope; to spread policy and design questions to those affected; to nurture dialogue about options and about the "values" and "interests" by which those options for policy and design may be evaluated; and, thus, to communicate genuine social and political possibilities, to say not only "Hey, that's the way it is," but also "Here's what could be done" and "Here's what we could do."

As any planner or public administrator knows, practical work is full of unnecessarily distorted communication. The very language analysts use in many bureaucracies creates such problems. Analysts often speak in a shorthand few others can understand. Public notices are often incomprehensible to anyone except agency staff. Ralph Hummel recently characterized bureaucratic communication with clients (what there is of it) as predominantly one-way.[14] After all, who tells whom how things are and what is possible? Benjamin Singer speaks of the "form work" demanded of clients before further interaction is possible. In many planning encounters, defensive behaviors include withholding information, suppressing feelings, and the strategic pursuit of unilateral control or dominance.[15] In so-called public hearings, exaggeration, fear, and intransigence often displace any public exploration of the issues involved in the proposals at hand. But Paulo Freire put it most powerfully: To deny other people's ability to communicate, to make sense, to understand and inquire both about what is and about what can yet be is tantamount to doing violence to them.[16]

The crucial point for practice is not that the claims of planners and policy advisors can be distorted. Of course they can be. Yet much distortion is avoidable, contingent and subject to change,

and thus unnecessarily harmful to the relatively poor, the unor-
ganized, the powerless in particular. Such practically alterable dis-
tortions occur in the simplest of settings. The neighbor of the
building site calls, or the community group stews, and the planner
is slow to return the call, much less to set up a meeting—editing
the text of another report may seem more rewarding. Or develop-
ers have money tied up in projects and need to move them along
quickly; they can afford to work more intimately, cooperatively,
and co-optatively with the planning staff than can the various
community organizations or affected groups. The control of capi-
tal by the relatively few in society means more than the possession
of wealth (Gaventa 1980). It means access, time, and expert ability
to press positions and arguments in both formal-bureaucratic and
informal settings; it spells a systematic distortion of the possibil-
ities of all affected people coming to terms with events shaping
their lives. In their daily work, then, planning analysts face a recur-
rent political choice: to anticipate and partially counteract such
distorted claims, or to acquiesce in the face of them, to be com-
plicit in obscuring them from public view.[17]

Here lies a crucial practical and ethical issue for planning ana-
lysts. In a democratic society citizens should be able not only to
find out about issues affecting their lives but also to communicate
meaningfully with other citizens about problems, social needs, and
alternative policy options. If the very work of planners and policy
analysts is to shape the communications—the warnings, reports,
promises, assurances, justifications, and so on—that influence citi-
zens' action, then should not planning analysts be responsible to
anticipate and counteract alterable, misleading, and disabling
claims and learn to nurture well-informed, genuinely democratic
politics and discourse instead?

Communicative Ethics:
Practical Action and Political Vision

How should analysts do such work? As analysts speak or act in
practice, the ways they organize or disorganize others' attention
inevitably link issues of ethics and politics.[18] How are analysts to
understand their responsibilities and the possibilities here? We will
explore several points in the following chapters.

Analysts should recognize that any organization shapes under-standings, expectations, and hopes as well as any material services it may provide. Organizations provide their members with schemes of categories and stereotypes that affect insiders and outsiders alike. Adopting these schemes, we may be patients in our doctors' offices, employees at work, children within families, neighbors in our towns and cities, and citizens within nation-states. With each identity come socially constructed prerogatives, obligations, and relations of power and authority.

Analysts should attend, too, to the false promises of some par-ties and to the futile attitudes, mistaken expectations, or cynicism of others. Doing that, they can work to overcome both stereotypes of others and stereotypes of what it is desirable and possible to do.[19] They might help affected persons explore project and policy possibilities, consequences, values, and uncertainties. They might organize effective participation, building power both outside and within mediated negotiations, for example, and so explore various processes of participatory design or policy criticism and dialogue.[20]

Planners and analysts should also work to counteract the politi-cal noise and flak coming from the very structure of the organiza-tions they work within: the flak intimidating outsiders, the noise confusing insiders, the peremptory, bureaucratic "that's how it is [i.e., must be]." Such work requires planning analysts to pose real possibilities of action, asking citizens for reformulations and new proposals, rather than simply "passing along solutions," so per-petuating "one-way communication," as Hummel puts it.

Analysts must recognize clearly that what gets done depends heavily on what gets said, and how it is said, and to whom. By doing so, they can seize opportunities to counteract a wide range of disabling and distorted claims: exaggerated threats, needlessly obscure and confusing analyses, strategically hidden information, manipulated expectations, and so on. Working in these ways, planning analysts can expose, however subtly and partially, un-warranted exercises of power and the resulting obstacles to citi-zens' political action. Those analysts can aid citizens' organizing efforts to reestablish legitimate and responsive public policy ini-tiatives. The chapters that follow discuss these possibilities in detail.

In contrast to this organizing view, finally, the means-ends and

information-processing accounts of planning analysis are empirically less fitting, functionally and strategically less illuminating, and ethically less instructive. To understand planning analysts' work as a potentially critical argumentative practice, selectively organizing (or disorganizing) others' attention to future possibilities of acting, appears to be a much more powerful account of what planning analysts really do—and can yet do.