EXECUTION OF ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES – A NEW PARADIGM IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

An Institutional strategy is a clear characterization of how an institution needs to transform over a considerable length of time in order to be able to configure its resources in demanding situation to meet the needs of society. Without a strategic framework an institution doesn’t know where it is going or why it is going there. The national goals for the higher education encapsulate the Government’s view of the minimum requirements of what the institutions need to do to meet their obligations as leading higher institutions of learning. Achieving these goals, institutions should provide a suitable frame work to translate such goals into workable activities. To accomplish the institution’s objectives, it is important to leverage the environment, and to that end are the SWOT analyses. It is, therefore, important to identify areas of opportunity where the strengths of the institution could be applied for maximum advantage while managing the constraints or threats and weaknesses. The thrust of this study is that the execution of strategic planning is a key aspect of strategic management of any institution and the set of processes undertaken to develop a range of strategies will ultimately contribute to achieving the organizational direction. In order to break inertia and maintain strategic alignment in times of change, this paper mainly discusses the concept of effective execution and some practical tools and techniques that offer opportunities to improve the execution process and achieve sustainable institutional excellence.

Keywords: Strategic plan, Management in Higher Education, SWOT
INTRODUCTION

Globalization of higher institutions of learning has become a universal phenomenon as comprehensive economic integration continues to make its way vigorously into higher education (Peng, 2009). This issue has risen to the top of the agenda of most world-class institutions across the globe. Like the corporate world, in order to be and/or remain globally competitive and relevant, top-notch institutions need to promote and create broad internationalization into their core operations.

Strategy is a tool for an institution to find its competitive advantage and place within the environment. In the recent past, institutions of higher education had confronted numerous changes in their external and internal environment, and respond to emerging challenges, such as inadequate funding, rapid technological advances, outdated academic programs, increasing demand for higher education, and a need to compete with the emerging models of higher education while keeping the essence of a traditional comprehensive system of institution. Strategic planning (AACSB International, 2007; Ashwin, 2006; Ansoff et al, 1976) is one of the major steps the institutions can take to address these challenges which benefits institutions in a variety of ways:

- Creates a framework for determining the direction an institution takes to achieve its desired future,
- Provides a framework for achieving competitive advantage,
- Allows all institutional constituencies to participate and work together towards accomplishing goals,
- Raises the dream of all key stakeholders, and allows the exchange of ideas between them improving understanding of the institutions’ vision, and fostering a sense of ownership of the strategic plan, and belonging to the institution,
- Aspires to line up the institution with its environment,
- Permits the institution to set priorities.

The aim of the Strategic planning (Chandler, 1962) process is to improve performance of the institution; to improve coherence between the outputs of individual higher education institutions and national goals; to develop greater coherence among higher education institutions in their academic and non-academic activities and to enhance complementarily, quality and efficiency.

Identification of the institution’s vision and mission is the first step of any strategic planning process. The institution’s vision sets out the reasons for institution’s existence that the institution aims to achieve; the mission identifies major goals and performance objectives. Both are defined within the framework of the institution’s philosophy, and are used as a context for development and evaluation of intended and emergent strategies. One cannot overemphasize the importance of a clear vision and mission; none of the subsequent steps will matter if the institution is not certain where it is headed. Although every strategic planning process must be uniquely designed to fit the specific needs of a particular institution. The institutions should begin by identifying its vision and mission. Once these are clearly defined, they should further move on to a series of analyses, including external, internal, gap, and benchmarking, which provided a context for developing institution’s
strategic issues. Strategic programming follows and the institution develops specific strategies including strategic goals, action plans, and procedures (Novicevic et al., 2007; Santovec, 2006). Periodically, the institution evaluates its strategies and reviews its strategic plan, considering emergent strategies and evolving changes. It usually takes several years before strategic planning becomes institutionalized and institutions learn to think strategically.

Pursuing a strategic plan must be a chore in the institutions and it should be done with great patience and discipline. To succeed in strategic planning the institutions will need to stay right to fundamentals of building a culture of excellence (Moore, 2002). The strategic planning process should start with professional data and needs analysis to support creation of the strategic plan document (Meyer et al 1983; Scott, 1995; Taylor, 1911; Val Candy et al, 2011. Implementation of the plan should involve the right people with the requisite inspiration. Evaluation should inform relevant updates of the plans to ensure that it fits the institution at any point in time. Success starts on leadership of the institution maintaining interest in the activity in its entirety and finding creative ways to keep the fire burning and to strengthen the strategic planning process. The institutions should also initiate partnership with other institutions to develop the relationship to learn each other to propel toward goals of excellence and world-class status.

CREATION OF SWOT PROFILE

The application of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) as a tool requires an internal survey of strengths and weaknesses of the institution and an external survey of threats and opportunities. It is a general tool designed to be used in the preliminary stages of decision-making and as a originator to strategic planning in various kinds of applications. When correctly applied, it is possible for an institution to get an overall picture of its present situation in relation to the societal needs. An understanding of the external factors, comprised of threats and opportunities, coupled with an internal examination of strengths and weaknesses assists in forming a vision of the future. Also, when executing this analysis it is important to understand how these elements work together. When an organization matched internal strengths to external opportunities, it creates core competencies in meeting the needs of its stakeholders. In addition, an institution should act to convert internal weaknesses into strengths and external threats into opportunities.

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<td>Strengths</td>
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<td>Weakness</td>
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Internal environment of the institution
1. faculty and staff
2. classrooms, laboratories and facilities (the learning environment)
3. the students
4. operating budget
5. institutional committees
6. research programs
External environment of the institution
1. prospective employers of graduates
2. parents and families of students
3. competing sister institutions
4. preuniversity schools & colleges
5. residents demographics
6. funding sources

The Internal Analysis of strengths and weaknesses focuses on internal factors that give an organization certain advantages and disadvantages in meeting the needs of its targets. Strengths refer to core competencies that give the institution an advantage in meeting the needs of its targets. Weaknesses should also be carefully examined from a stakeholder perspective because stakeholders often perceive weaknesses that an institution cannot see.

When the analysis has been completed a SWOT profile can be generated and used as the basis of goal setting, strategy formulation and execution.

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When formulating strategy, the interaction of quadrant (S1 – T1 etc. ) in the SWOT matrix become important. For example, the strength (S) can be leveraged to pursue opportunities (O) and to avoid threats (T), and managers can be alerted to weakness (W) that might need to be overcome in order to successfully pursue opportunities (O).

FORMULATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Most often, national goals are political decisions. These goals are used by the institutions to identify the path and process to be taken in achieving the institutional goals. This is the delicate exercise every institution faces because every institution tends to identify her own institutional goals, which may not be easily transferable to another institution.

Proposed Strategic planning pyramid:
(1) Top-down approach for institution as whole
(2) Bottom-up approach for institution units and divisions.
Scope for Institutions to develop and propose their own targets and indicators subject to cross-examination, is envisaged as part of the process. The National strategic goals recognise that the most appropriate governance system for higher education is one that supports institutional autonomy within a clear accountability framework. The strategic planning process must respect and support the complementary and diverse missions of the different sister institutions to strengthen the shared sense of autonomy between the institutions and their stakeholders.
In order to have in place an effective system of strategic plan a number of important underpinning elements must be taken into consideration:

- Clear policy directions from the Government as to the goals that are required of the Higher Education sector.
- Scope for Institutions to develop and propose their own targets and indicators subject to cross-examination as part of the process.
- Effective systems for strategic planning and performance monitoring within institutions.
- Effective systems for capturing and using data nationally to measure performance.
EXECUTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Although execution is a key to success, it is not an easy task. Here is an institution with an embedded culture and structure, a set way of doing things. For the institution to adapt to its new competitive environment, major changes would be necessary, and those changes would be no simple child's play. Execution is critical to success. Execution represents a disciplined process or a logical set of connected activities that enables an institution to take a strategy and make it work. Without a careful, planned approach to execution, strategic goals cannot be attained. Developing such a logical approach, however, represents a formidable challenge to management. Despite its importance, execution is often handled poorly by many institutions. There still are countless cases of good plans going askew because of substandard execution efforts. There are dreadful roadblocks or hurdles that get in the way of the execution process and seriously damage the implementation of strategy. The road to successful execution is full of potholes that must be filled up by appropriate stuff for execution success.

Discipline of execution

1. **Planning:** This involves decision on tasks that must be performed to attain institutional goals and outlining how the task must be performed.
2. **Organising:** This creates a mechanism to put plans into action. People within the institution are given work assignments that contribute to goal attainment. Tasks are organised so that the output of individuals will contribute to the success of institution units, which will then contribute to the success of divisions, which in turn will finally contribute to the institution as whole.
3. **Motivating:** The ultimate aim of motivating is to increase productivity. Human-oriented work situations usually generate higher levels of production over the long term than work situations that people find distasteful. Therefore, motivation is primarily the process of guiding the activities of institution members in appropriate directions to help institution move toward goal attainment.
4. **Controlling:** This is an ongoing process and the executive continually gathers information, make their comparisons, and then try to find new ways to improving...
production through institutional modification i.e. management function for which
Executives
(i) Gather information that measures current performance within the institution,
(ii) Compare present performance to established performance standards,
(iii) From this comparison, determine if any change is required to meet pre-established
standards.

CONCLUSION

Even though, in reality, there may be a separation of planning and execution tasks, the
two are highly interdependent. Planning affects execution. The execution of strategy, in turn,
affects changes to strategy and planning over time. This relationship between planning and
achievement suggests two critical points to keep in mind. Successful strategic outcomes are
best achieved when those responsible for execution are also part of the planning or
formulation process. The greater the interaction between "executives" and "planners" or the
greater the overlap of the two processes or tasks, the higher the probability of execution
success. Execution demands a great deal of attention to make it work. The execution of
strategy usually takes longer than the formulation of strategy. The longer time frame can
make it harder for executive to focus on and control the execution process, as many things,
some unforeseen, can materialize and challenge executive's attention. A strategy should also
be articulated and a plan of execution developed to educate key personnel and to set goals
consistent with the new thrust. Change is impossible without commitment to the decisions
and actions that define strategy execution. The execution of strategy is not a trivial part of
executive work; it defines the essence of that work. If the executives muster all the four
discipline of execution and also infuse this discipline in the institution people, the execution
gap might be closed within a stipulated time frame.

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