

## “Mission, Vision, Objectives and Strategic Management in Higher Education”

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### **Abstract:**

The main goal of this paper is to identify and discuss some basic principles of strategy-making processes in a higher educational institutions in the traditional context, and to stimulate further discussion on this topic. The study aims at providing an in-depth analysis of how strategic management and mottos, which comprises mission, vision, objectives of a higher education institution impacts and works in higher education and to study the means and strategies adopted by different educational institutions.

### **Introduction:**

#### **What is higher education?**

It is necessary to understand what the purposes of higher education are. A clear understanding shapes the perception for need for strategic management in higher education. One definition that identified four purposes for higher education was offered by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in the United Kingdom, chaired by Ron Dearing in 1997:

- a) To inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential levels throughout life, so that they grow intellectually, are well equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society, and achieve personal fulfilment;
- b) To increase knowledge and understanding for their own sake and to foster their application to the benefit of the economy and society;
- c) To serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional, and national levels;
- d) To play a major part in shaping a democratic, civilized, inclusive society. It is to achieve these ends that higher education has developed. These are common ideals, recognized throughout the world. To varying degrees, they provide the philosophical framework within

which all institutions of higher education operate. The full or partial fulfilment of these objectives provides the essential reasons for universities, colleges, and other providers of higher education to exist, and offers the backdrop against which all effective planning and management of higher education must take place.

#### **Strategic Management**

Strategic management is a comprehensive approach to managing organizations that has evolved over a number of years and draws on many different areas of organization and management theory. Since the 1970s, strategic management has been regularly used in the private and educational sector as a way of coping with environmental uncertainty. While strategic planning is a central component of strategic management, strategic planning and strategic management are not the same thing. Strategic management is a process carried out at the top of the organization which provides guidance, direction, and boundaries for all aspects of operational management. Strategic planning, on the other hand, places more emphasis on strategy than operations and can be thought of as a process that constitutes the backbone of strategic management. Strategic management exists when organizations move

beyond planning to develop mechanisms for the implementation of strategies. Steiss (1985), for example, defines strategic management as the "process whereby goals and objectives are identified, policies are formulated, and strategies are selected in order to achieve the overall purposes or mission of an organization."

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

These are the following objectives of my study:

- 1) To study the need of continuous Strategic Management in higher education.
- 2) To study the means and strategies adopted by different educational institutions.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The study has been conducted by consulting existing literature through historical, analytical and empirical approaches. Historical-analytical method has been taken into consideration while observing the reports related with the study and while examining the other literature relevant to the study. Case study method, an empirical technique, is applied to study the various dimensions and impact of strategic management, vision, mission and objective statement on education sector.

#### **Institutional Mission and Values**

##### **Mission**

The foundation of any strategic plan is the institutional mission statement. This statement delineates, in concise language, why the institution exists and what its operations are intended to achieve. For publicly controlled institutions, this statement of purpose may be dictated by the state, but for all institutions the statement serves as the explanation for the existence of the organization.

Historically, mission statements were long, exhaustively detailed descriptions of the institution's founding, curricular history, unique culture and current services. The mission statement also often included an explanation of what the institution stood for and what it intended its students to become. An interested student of strategic planning can open any archived college catalogue to find,

within the first few pages, a mission statement at least a full page long containing all the historic information about the institution anyone would care to know. These types of mission statements have been termed "comprehensive mission statements" because they tend to include everything anyone thought might be important to know about the institution. With the advent of contemporary planning methods, however, the comprehensive mission statement became a limiting factor in the planning process. Two major problems were created by trying to develop a strategic plan based on a comprehensive mission statement. First, it could be difficult to sift through the verbiage to isolate and identify *specifically* those elements of the statement everyone agreed identified the foundation for all activities. This identification was critical because the accrediting commissions had formed an evaluation standard to examine how well all operations aligned with the mission. Comprehensive missions, as a result of their breadth, provided ample opportunity for wide interpretation; a condition called "mission creep". Institutions found themselves having to justify community outreach or academic programs that extended the activities of the institution beyond its actual mission. From the perspective of the accrediting commission, a situation where the institution was using resources for activities beyond the scope of its mission indicated the institution might not be using its resources as effectively as possible. This definition of "institutional effectiveness" meant accrediting commissions were looking for a direct relationship between how the institution used its resources and what the mission statement outlined as the reason the institution existed. The second limitation of comprehensive mission statements was that most of them were rife with statements about institutional culture and values. While critical to revealing how the institution differed from others with similar characteristics, the effect of these statements was to virtually require the

institution to evaluate and assess them as part of institutional effectiveness. With all the other aspects of assessment academy needed to oversee, developing measurements for values was perhaps not the most critical priority. As a result of these very real limitations, more recent planning practice limits the mission to its primary function.

The mission statement is stripped down to a very short, basic statement of purpose. If the institution believes it also needs to provide a separate set of institutional goals, they can be appended to the shorter mission statement in a subsection or displayed in conjunction with the mission statement. The mission statement can then be a clear, concise statement, "This is *what* we are here to do."

### **Values**

Values have been removed from the mission to their own Values Statement component. There, they explain what the institution stands for and the way in which it intends to conduct its activities. In some cases, these values are so important the institution has programs and assessment measures to support and sustain them as key elements.

But regardless of their priority, within the context of planning and evaluation, the values statement should declare, "These are the characteristics we believe are important in *how* we do our work."

### **The Institutional Vision Statement:**

The institutional vision statement is one of the most important components of a strategic plan. The vision statement is an institution's clear description of what it intends *to become* within a certain timeframe. The vision statement defines the institution's strategic position in the future and the specific elements of that position with relationship to the mission statement. In some cases, the vision is that of one leader at the campus. Often this leader is the president, but the vision can sometimes come from an academic vice president too. Usually, however, the vision is reviewed and revised by members

of the campus community, especially the strategic planning committee.

Vision statements benefit the planning process by providing everyone in the institution with the same vision of the future. If the purpose of the planning process is to align mission, vision, goals and resources, it is critical to ensure those who will be called upon to implement the strategic plan are all "pulling in the same direction". This is especially true if the vision statement is really a reflection of one person's vision for the institution. In this case, it is in the best interests of the institution to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to "own" the vision, either through review and revision of the statement or some form of early input into the statement draft.

The mission and vision statements provide the two ends of an analytical view of the institution from which the strategic plan is developed. The mission and vision represent the current and envisioned state of the institution. The strategic plan is used to bridge the gap between the two. It is regularly assumed by members of the campus community that a vision statement can only be produced if market research has been conducted to determine what educational needs are not being met by peer and aspirational institutions. This perception is only partially true. In fact, market research is more effective if it is conducted *after* the vision statement has been written and approved. What is needed to complete a strategic plan is, more often, an environmental scan.

One of the most curious problems with writing a vision statement comes when those writing the statement have to decide whether the verbs in the statement are present or future tense. There are so many subtle implications for either approach, and it is often the case that the strategic planning committee will write the vision statement in one tense and then change it to the other.

### **Strategic Goals and Objectives:**

There is much confusion about the terms used to name the parts of a strategic plan. Many

people use the words "goal" and "objective" almost interchangeably, and have a distinct rationale for their particular definitions. In point of fact, as long as everyone involved in the planning process agrees to a definitional hierarchy, any combination of words can be used. However the words goal and objective carry connotations that can help guide their use in the process. The word goal connotes specific achievement; a target reached and "checked off". The word objective is slightly more general in connotation. An objective helps set a course by giving a general direction, but an objective does not usually contain the specifics of its own completion. Given the nature of the activities required to implement a plan, and the need to assess the achievement of the plan's implementation, it seems logical to use terms that encourage overarching directional guidance for the major themes that organize the plan, and more specific terms for the parts of the plan requiring accountability and measurement.

For example, a major theme in many strategic plans is to improve academic programs. Each institution has its own perspective on what is important about academic programs, and these statements usually reflect an institutionally-specific perspective. One institution might want to ensure programs and curriculum fit the educational needs of its student population, while another institution is more interested in improving its curriculum by expanding its graduate and research programs. These are very general desires, and might best be called strategic objectives, themes, or even directions. However, the specific actions taken to improve academic programs could range from ensuring all academic programs offer an internship option for students who want "real world" experience to setting target enrollments for specific graduate programs or research funds or scholarships brought to the campus. These types of actions seem to fit more closely the definition of a goal, because they can be measured and "checked off".

Regardless of the words selected to name the parts of a strategic plan, these basic elements—goals and objectives—form the basis of the portion of the strategic plan most often used as the public document, approved by the governing board, and distributed to the campus community.

There is one final caution about the goals and objectives of a strategic plan—timing. While many universities continue using their objective for a long time period some colleges and universities use either a five or ten year cycle for their plans. These cycles are often driven as much by the reaccreditation schedule as any internal issue. For this reason, most strategic plans have overarching themes that are very general and do not tend to change over time. In fact, in many planning processes, these overarching themes can be carried over from one planning cycle to the next with only minor modification. The goals used as the basis for the implementation plan are a different issue, however. There is a tendency to "front load" (Distribute or allocate (costs, effort, etc.) unevenly, with the greater proportion at the beginning of the institution or process) or "back load" (place more charges at the later stages than at the earlier stages) the deadlines for the goals in a plan.

Front loading usually occurs because enthusiasm is high and everyone would like to see the plan successfully completed. Another reason front loading occurs is those who are determining the deadlines are used to thinking in short one or two year timeframes. This approach misses completely the purpose of a five or ten year planning cycle, which allows more complex solutions to be spread out over a longer period of time. In either circumstance, front loaded goals take the form of assuming a goal can be completed in a very short period of time, and also assumes a minimum of effort. These assumptions encourage people responsible for the implementation to take the fastest, least complicated path to completion. In many cases, if an issue has risen to the level of the strategic plan, it is not easily addressed nor

is it a simple issue. Back loading usually occurs when members of the institutional community are not committed to the plan or are unsure about the resources needed to implement. A thoughtful strategic planning committee will use its collective wisdom to ensure each goal is appropriately phased.

There are several reasons phasing is necessary. One of the most obvious is, in many cases, before one action can be taken, another has to be completed. A second reason, where resources are concerned, is any need to accrue the personnel, facilities, or funding necessary for the action. Using the strategic planning committees as a forum to question and test the reasonableness of proposed deadlines is often a challenge. In many cases, institutional personnel are not used to thinking holistically about initiatives with wide-ranging scopes or timelines. It is difficult to develop in planning committee members that sense of strategic thinking that allows them to look cross-functionally to see the implications for the entire institution. For example, if the institution has determined it will expand the number and types of student support services offered through Student Affairs, most planning committee members will assume Student Affairs will see to the implementation. However, what if that implementation requires an upgrade to technology? The IT department needs to consider what the upgrade will require and how long it will take, not only in terms of technology but also with regard to staff training. Additionally, the Facilities Department will need to know if there are to be changes to the spaces currently being used in Student Affairs, or if new space needs to be found and what length of time it may take to produce that space. While a great many of these types of issues can be discussed in committee and the deadlines revised, in some cases the projects are complicated enough to require actual process analysis techniques to determine the sequence of actions. Regardless of the method used, the result is a strategic plan populated with short-, middle-, and long-range deadlines that form

the backbone of a strategic plan that is realistic in terms of what can be accomplished and in what timeframe.

Taking the time to ensure the strategic plan reflects such phasing has two other significant benefits. First, it provides a learning opportunity regarding institution-level thinking for members of the planning committee. Second, phasing the major goals of the strategic plan begins the process of thinking through the implementation plan, which will build on the phased aspects of the strategic plan. What the strategic planning committee should not allow is an effort to "cost out" the entire plan as if it were all going to be implemented simultaneously. A demand for costing out is often an attempt to scale back the scope of the plan, but can also be seen as a misunderstanding of how the planning process works. Scaling back a plan as a result of tight resources will happen automatically if it needs to happen. What is incumbent on the members of the planning committee is to ensure the transformational aspects of the vision are captured in the goals and objectives and phasing is realistic for implementation.

It is important to remember the ultimate purpose of a strategic plan is to drive resource allocation. If the institution has a objective requiring additional resources, it phases implementation of that objective over time, including securing the resources to make it happen.

### **The Implementation Plan**

Turning goals and objectives into a working plan is the function of the Implementation Plan. This part of the strategic planning process is not usually for public consumption, and seldom is made available to the governing board. There are a variety of reasons this working document is not widely distributed, but the primary one is, more than any other part of the strategic plan, the implementation plan is revised, amended, and changed

frequently to respond to environmental factors. While the strategic plan's goals and objectives remain a source of guidance and focus, the implementation plan delves into the messy work of getting the job done.

One other aspect of the implementation plan critical to the planning process—and also to the budgeting process—is identifying the resources each goal and step will require. It should be noted resources, in this instance, are defined in the broadest way possible. Resources for implementing a strategic plan include: people, time, space, technology, and funding. Sometimes, the exact amount of a critical resource is not known at the time of the plan's inception; however, the type of resource can be identified. It is important to know what specific resources will be needed and continue to refine the size of the need as the plan develops.

The implementation plan needs to be directive, clear, and documented. The implementation of a strategic plan depends on the institution's ability to turn strategic thoughts into operational action. For this reason it is necessary to document who is responsible for implementing an action, a date by which the action is expected to be completed, and what measures will be used to assess completion of the action. It is wise to ensure the person assigned responsibility for the action has the authority to make it happen. It is also wise to identify one and only one person to be the agent accountable for overseeing completion of the action. Obviously many people or departments may be needed to implement a specific action. However, if a group is designated as accountable, each person in the group will believe someone else in the group is taking charge.

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