

A ROAD MAP FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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SUMMARY

Strategic planning is one of the key elements of successful management in higher educations. There has been some initiatives such as Bologna process in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness as well as quality of the education in all over Europe. Strategic planning will definitely help to that purpose. However, it is not easy to do the planning as it deals with a lot of uncertainties and requires detailed analysis of current situation and a clear look towards the future. This paper presents a roadmap for creating such plan and indicates possible areas to concentrate in doing the analysis. It is important to follow this road map for the sake of creating an implementable plan and monitoring the implementations within the organization for which the plan is established.

Keyword: Total quality management, strategic planning, higher education, effective teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions should be restructured in accordance with current technological progress. It is extremely important for those to follow the change and create efficient and effective training and teaching environment. Since long life learning programs (LLP) are seen as essential for the development of the society, universities should be able to generate educated populations who are capable of handling these LLP initiatives. To be able to achieve that a proper strategic approach should be developed and implemented yield a better plans which have strategic importance to educational activities. This will surely increase the quality of the education. Strategic approaches to educational activities are also in the agenda of higher Education council of Turkey (THEC) for more than 4 years. Due to imminent need foreseen, An Academic Assessment and Quality Development Regulation is issued which is putting a responsibility to university managements to prepare their strategic plans and perform periodic reviews for the sake of sustaining quality of the research and education [1]. There have been several approaches to assure the quality and defining respective indicators of the education in European Universities in the same manner [2]. To bring about an educational facility which is quite compatible with the rest of the world is not easy. It does not only require planning but also a clear vision towards the future, detailed analysis of the current system in the light of the vision encountered , deployable policies effectively managed action plans as well as periodic monitoring and assessment. This can only be assured with strategic approaches. Strategic approaches may assure the following;

- performing planning activities in the light of ultimate goals to achieve
- utilising limited number of resources to satisfy predefined goals
- identifying and prioritising needs as all of them cannot be met with current capabilities necessitating the most strategic issues to be dealt with first

The only way to achieve those is to implement a proper planning process making sure that all activities are carried out as expected by the process itself. However, there is one thing to keep in mind that, there is always unstable, changing, dynamic and complex environments in which universities are operating. Therefore long term planning and strategic planning should not be mixed out. Chang (2006) distinguishes these two concepts [3].

Performing strategic planning in service producing organizations such as universities is not easy due to the nature of the tasks and responsibilities. There is always a need for a road map indicating key areas to concentrate. This paper presents such a road map in creating a strategic plan which will motivate internal dynamics of the universities and create a prosperous educational facility. The study is mainly based on the implementation carried out successfully in Sakarya University.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Strategic planning is a well known systematically designed process as illustrated in Figure 1. This process has some implications in terms of implementations in various organizations. They internal dynamics of organization is a highly effective in creating an implementable plan.

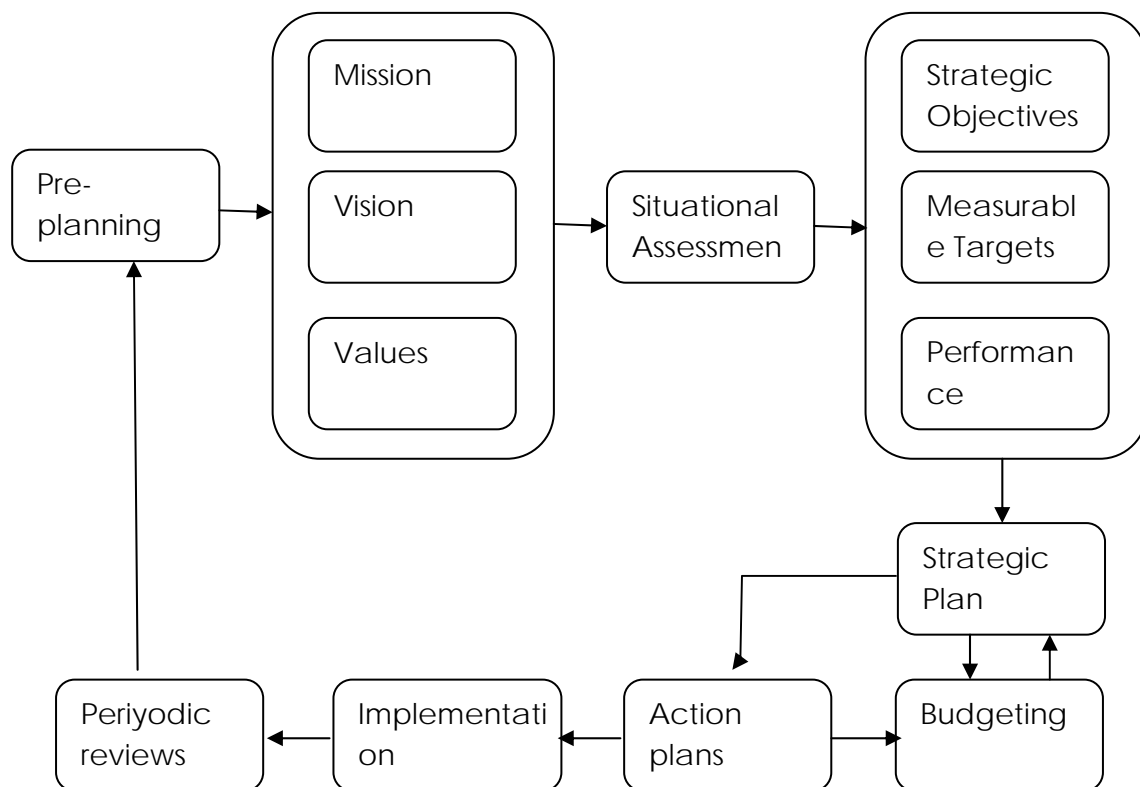


Figure 1. Strategic planning process [taken from: 4]

As illustrated in Figure 1, strategic planning starts with a series of pre-planned activities and continues with the assessment of organizational values, mission and vision. Based on this a situational assessment is carried in order to highlight the existing and current situation of the

organization. This is expected to produce SWOT results indicating the lack of performance of the organization for certain areas related to organizational goals and mission. Following the situational analysis strategic objectives are defined to be the baseline for functional measurable targets. Performance indicators will be developed to follow the progress of organizational activities with respect targets. A clear action plans and resource management is also essential part of the planning process and implementation should be periodically monitored in order to assure that the progress is achieved towards the objectives.

3. A ROAD MAP FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROCESS

The road map proposed here follows the principles that the strategic plan starts with the mission and continue with analysis, strategic development and goal setting as well as defining the performance targets. Figure 2 indicates the link between the planning steps for which the proposed road map is set up.

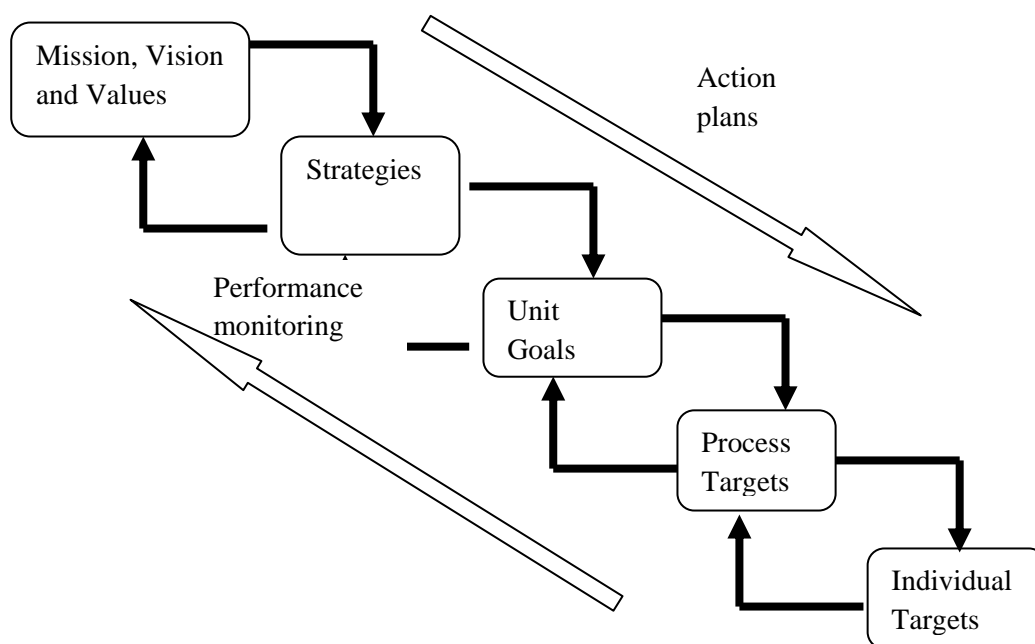


Figure2: Relationship between mission, strategy, goals and targets

Following recommendation can be proposed in order to implement the process explained above as much properly as possible.

A. Establishing a Planning Committee

Planning Committee is an important body to keep track of planning process. There is a big misunderstanding about this committee. This committee is not responsible to create the plan rather it is responsible to coordinate the planning activities. The planning process requires certain types of inputs. Whoever has the required inputs is responsible to provide information and all employees should be responsible to prepare the plan. This committee should bring things together, should arrange meeting rooms etc. and make sure that all activities as defined in the process is implemented without a delay.

B. Establishing Tiger Teams

In each Department, faculty or School there is going to be very tight schedule and extremely heavy set of activities. In order to prevent confusions and mis- understandings a tiger team for each unit can be set up to be responsible to feed Planning committee regarding the activities of the departments as well as to provide respective required inputs.

C. Issuing a Circular Order

In order to increase the influence of planning Committee and creating an awareness of the tight planning Schedule a circular order needs to be circulated within the organization as well as respective other bodies (higher education council, Local governorship, municipality, public organizations having relationship with the university). This order should clearly include the aim of the planning, planning committee, and a clear Schedule of respective activities.

D. Preparing a Planning Schedule

The schedule should include all activities together with start and finish times. The following activities should definitely be involved in the Schedule.

- i. Creating tiger teams within the Departments/ Program Units.
- ii. Training and introducing the planning process to the teams and all staff if required
- iii. Preparing data for SWOT analysis (What is to be analysed and evaluated)
- iv. Performing SWOT analysis in Departments and collect the results by faculty management.
- v. Fine tuning the SWOT analysis in Faculty level and eliminating the repetitive statements.
- vi. Gathering the SWOT results by Planning Committee.
- vii. Evaluating the SWOT results and creating the SWOT results for the university.
- viii. Identifying strategies based on SWOT analysis and in line with university mission.
- ix. Circulating the strategies to Tiger teams and collect comments
- x. Finalize the strategies based on the comments received.
- xi. Identify set of unit/Departmental/faculty wise goals (functional objectives) to achieve strategies defined.
- xii. Identify set of performance indicators to monitor implementation of the strategies and goals.
- xiii. Identify performance targets for the Departments and get agreement on those with the department.
- xiv. Draft the strategic plan
- xv. Review of plan by the Departments and Faculties
- xvi. Improve the Draft Plan in the light of the comments.
- xvii. Ask the Departments/Faculties/Program Units to prepare action plans so that the assigned objectives can be satisfied.
- xviii. Create budget plan for achieving assigned activities in the action plans.
- xix. Revise and finalise the plan according to action plans and budgeted availability.
- xx. Approval of the plan by the senate of the university
- xxi. Setting up a monitoring Committee.
- xxii. Preparing a presentation and asking the tiger teams to introduce of the plan in the Departments.
- xxiii. Introduction of the plan to all university staff (both administrative and academic) by the rector of the university.

E. Training and introducing the planning process

The success of planning depends upon the people to comprehend and implement the process as much effectively as possible. Although it is straight forward process, most of the people especially the academics and management level may not be aware of the process and respective activities. It is therefore extremely important to train the people and increase the awareness of the planning process within the university units. This will definitely increase the awareness and cooperation as well as participation of the staff and reduce the level of resistance which is also inevitable. The staff may think that some people may prepare the plan and they can implement it. However, strategic plan is not any kind of a plan. It has a severe effect of the organizational activities. When these effect appears than resistance start to block the activities. It is important to solve this problem at the beginning of the process through some introductory and training as well as awareness activities

F. SWOT Analysis

There are two kinds of analysis regarding the SWOT; Internal Self evaluation and External assessment. Experiences show that it is sufficient to perform a self evaluation on the following areas. The faculties/program Units and respective Departments were asked to rank the required level of satisfaction from 1-5 where 1 indicate a great insufficiency and 5 indicates a superior sufficiency on the respected issue under assessment. Any topic under the scale of 3 indicates a weakness and above 4 indicates strongest side of the organization. Note that the average values are taken after collecting the information from the departments. Each Department may judge its sufficiency with its own scaled assessment and perform improvement activities.

- Organizational capabilities and qualifications:
 - ✓ Expected qualification level of students
 - ✓ Expected qualification level of academics
 - ✓ Expected qualification level of administrative and service staff
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of financial resources
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of knowledge resources (computers, internet, books, publications, etc)
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of physical infrastructure
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of services provided.
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of industrial relationship
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of relationship with the society and public organizations
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of former graduates
 - ✓ Expected level of relationship with employees (administrative, service and academics) and staff satisfaction
 - ✓ Expected level of relationship with students and student satisfaction
 - ✓ Expected level of national relationship with other higher educational institutions in the same domain
 - ✓ Expected level of international relationship with other higher educational institutions in the same domain.
 - ✓ Expected level of number of academic staff
 - ✓ Expected number of publications
 - ✓ Expected number of fielded projects
 - ✓ Expected amount of academic achievements (new theories, innovativeness etc.)
 - ✓ Expected number of academic activities (in certain domains if identified)
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency level of laboratories

- ✓ Expected level of class facilities (equipments, projectors, desks etc.)
- ✓ Expected level of social clubs and other related facilities
- Educational and Training processes
 - ✓ Suitability of the programs to national and regional needs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of educational activities with respect to educational objectives
 - ✓ Sufficiency of contents of the programs (number of courses, course contents, course variety, course credits etc.)
 - ✓ Level of understandability of the program and respective objectives
 - ✓ Integrity and continuity of the programs
 - ✓ Expected sufficiency of the program outputs.
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the resources available to the programs
 - ✓ Expected level of program relationship with other programs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of educational services and supervision to students
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the tools and procedures designed to evaluate the students
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the procedures designed to prepare new student to the educational programs.
 - ✓ Sufficiency of educational support systems (IT technologies, computers etc.)
 - ✓ Suitability of the programs to national and international similar programs.
- R&D processes
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the R&D programs and their prioritisation
 - ✓ Suitability of the R&D programs to national and regional needs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of resources available to R&D programs
 - ✓ Integrity and continuity of the R&D programs
 - ✓ Expected level of interdisciplinary R&D programs
 - ✓ Expected level of international R&D cooperation
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the tools and procedures supporting R&D programs
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in meeting the R&D objectives through R&D programs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of integration of R&D programs with educational programs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of R&D result implemented in fielded projects
 - ✓ Expected number of fielded projects
 - ✓ Expected level of support received from the stakeholders in R&D programs
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in turning the results of the R&D programs into benefit of the society
 - ✓ Expected level of institutional gains from the R&D programs.
 - ✓ Level of marketing the R&D results
- Service processes
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the services provided staff and society
 - ✓ Sufficiency of resources available to service providers
 - ✓ Expected level of interdisciplinary service providing capabilities
 - ✓ Sufficiency of the tools and procedures supporting services and respective implementations.
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in meeting the service providing capabilities respective implementations
 - ✓ Sufficiency of integration of respective services with educational programs
 - ✓ Sufficiency of integration of respective services with R&D programs

- ✓ Level of marketing the services to be provided to society
 - ✓ Expected level of support received from the stakeholders in providing the services
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in long life training activities
 - ✓ Expected level of knowledge providing capabilities to society
 - ✓ Expected level of benefits gained by the society through university services
 - ✓ Expected level of institutional gains from the services provided by the university
- Administrative processes
 - ✓ Expected level of administrative services (cleaning, bidding, transportation etc.)
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in budgeting process
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in student affairs (grading, transcript providing, union facilities etc.)
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in academic staff activities regarding student affairs (giving the marks on time etc.)
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in library and respective documentation
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in environmental structuring and gardening
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in technical support for infrastructure
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in IT support and communication
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in media related activities
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in health related activities
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in social and cultural as well sport activities supported
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in scholarship provided to the students
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in dormitory facilities provided to the students
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in student union and club related activities
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in following international affairs and getting the university to become the part of those
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in getting students to become the part of carrier development activities
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in internship and respective facilities of the university provided to the students.
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in providing the support to student union as a whole
- Managerial processes
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of existing strategies and implementation processes
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction and sufficiency of organizations current structure
 - ✓ Expected level of clarity in defining the tasks and duties
 - ✓ Expected level of authority provided in performing the duties
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of decision making process
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of business processes
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of quality assurance processes
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of knowledge management processes
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of managing financial processes

- ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in human resource management activities
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of student participation processes
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency in sharing the common culture and respective activities
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in leadership
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of managerial approaches
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of interdepartmental communication facilities
 - ✓ Expected level of sufficiency of cooperation between academics in both same department of different departments
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction of working environments in different parts of the university
- Outputs
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in academic achievements
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in student achievements
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in services provided.
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction of the society
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction of academic personnel and students as well as administrative staff.
- Mission based performance evaluations.
 - ✓ Expected level of satisfaction in achieving the mission. (Respective indicators to measure will be defined through analysing the organization mission)

External analysis will be carried out in order to define the threats and opportunities to be used by the universities. The following areas should be taken into account in performing the External analysis.

- ✓ National progress in educational activities and national relationships along this line
- ✓ International progress in educational activities and international relationship along this line
- ✓ Relationship with former graduates and progress along this line
- ✓ Relationship with the society and progress along this line
- ✓ Relationship with industry, social and public organizations and progress along with this line
- ✓ Progress of educational and training technologies
- ✓ National regulations, law and other issues juristically effecting the organization
- ✓ Possible contribution to economical, commercial and technological progress of the society through university activities
- ✓ Expected level of stakeholder satisfaction

G. Looking towards the future (Strategy developing and goal setting)

Once SWOT analysis is completed, the results should be utilised in order to define the future activities of the university which will also have strategic influence in the progress of the organization. There are certain things to be carried out along this line.

- ✓ Review of mission and vision statements as well as values and accepted policies of the organization: This will make sure that the organizational progress is in line with the organizational mission. The university should

make sure that proper policies (quality, education, R&D, human resource management, environment and marketing etc.) defined and implemented all over the organization.

- ✓ Defining strategies taking the SWOT results into account. The strategies should be defined in such a way that it will overcome institutional weaknesses utilising strongest side of the organization as well as avoid threats through utilising the opportunities. Note that the strategies once defined, should not be contradicting with the organizational mission. Some organizations may wish to develop different strategies for each analysis as specified above or define strategies affecting several areas all together.
- ✓ Defining functional goals with respect to implementing defined strategies. There should be at least one goal which is to be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely).
- ✓ Defining performance indicator for each goals to be assessed whether it was effectively satisfied or not. For each indicator there should be a target value for which the units will have to try to achieve. There can be different target for different units and departments of the university. The university should graphically monitor the progress along with each performance indicator even for the last 3-5 year progress.
- ✓ Prepare action plans for each goal to be satisfied in the light of respective performance indicator. Each action plan should indicate specific action, start and finish time of the actions, responsible person to carry out the actions as well as action dependencies (if any)

H. Budgeting

A good strategic plan can only be secured if enough funds are available to carry out the actions to be able to satisfy the goals and therefore respective strategies. If no budget available then there is no point how good the strategies are. In case of shortage of the budget, the goals should be decreased to a certain level to pertain the budget. Even some of the strategies could be pending according to the situation of the budget. The plan should only be sent to approval only if there are enough resources to carry out the tasks of the respective goals.

I. Approval of the Plan by the senate of the university

Once SWOT analysis are done, respective strategies are defined, respective goals together with their action plans and performance targets are identified than the plan may be drafted and circulated for the comments. Each tiger team in units may bring the comments back and then the draft version may be updated accordingly by the planning committees. Some comments may be rejected due to some certain reasons. These should be informed back to the originator of the comments in order not to loose the interest on the plan. Once the plan is finalised then it should be sent to university senate for approval. Once approved then it should be taken into implementation without a delay. There should be presentation to be done in each unit to make the people to become aware of the plan and its existence in operation.

J. Setting up of a monitoring committee and monitoring system

Putting the plan into implementation will not be enough. There is a need for a monitoring mechanism. There should be periodical reviews (in every 3-4 months time). There should be monitoring committee to be set up to collect and analyse the respective data. Tiger team members may be taking the responsibility of monitoring the progress. However, in every review period, the university management should create a review report and present it in senate meeting to inform the progress to the senate. Performance indicators may show some

lack of implementations and problems. The responsible bodies should take an immediate action to improve the system and increase the strategic performance of the organization. In the review meetings such review should also be discussed and some general regulations should be derived out of those which have a good effect on performance of the organizations.

K. Introduction of the report to university and outside the organization

The university rector should introduce the plan to stakeholders in the city and other related bodies outside the organization as well as inside the organization. This may take the overall attention of the university staff to take care of the strategic plan related activities and increase implementation motivation.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a road map for creating strategic plans for the universities. The proposed strategy is implemented in Sakarya University which produced a very good and implementable strategic plan. The plan is created in 2005 and continues to evolve since then. The monitoring procedure is improved and IT based monitoring system is set up for easy collection of the data required for assessing the performance of the plan. There was a resistance at the beginning to some extent however, due to the involvement of Rector and other university top management broke down the resistance and increased participation. It is therefore extremely important to get management support in creating such a plan. Another aspect to note here is that the process is based on some measurable milestones and indicators. This also helped a lot to finalize the activities.

Acknowledgement: The authors would like to thank all members of the University Rector and respective Planning Committee members as well as Tiger teams (SAUDEK members) for their involvement and effort to make the proposed road map to be applicable and help to improve the implementation.

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