

Chapter 10

Vision and Strategic Planning of University Governance: The Case of Middle East Technical University

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the participative and iterative strategic planning process that was used in Middle East Technical University (METU), as a “good practice” for other institutions of higher education in two major stages: (1) preparation of the strategic plan and (2) its deployment to all organizational units via a catch-ball approach. Both stages are iterative as they involve consecutive phases of collection, evaluation, sharing, and alignment of findings along with strategies, first among different strategic planning areas in the preparation stage, and second among different organizational units in the deployment stage. It is participative in that a large body of internal stakeholder representatives organized into various cross functional teams have carried out strategic planning at the university level. A support team assumes a critical role in coordinating the studies carried out by separate committees, and reporting the process its outcomes to University Strategic Planning Council to ensure the consistency.

INTRODUCTION

Roots of strategic planning dates back to the early 1920s, with the use of the Harvard Policy Model which aims to develop a fit between the institution and its environment – taking management values and social obligations of the firm into account. The major advantage of this model is its relying on the use of Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis (Kretovics, 2011) to identify internal and external environments, which is one of the key activities in contemporary strategic planning processes.

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The literature on strategic planning has flourished throughout 1980s, along with new approaches, with the notion of strategic planning spreading to the public sector (Bryson & Roering, 1987).

The idea of strategic planning in universities was discussed as early as the 1980s by Kotler and Murphy (1981) arguing that universities are capable of undertaking “operations, that is, efficiently, doing the same things day after day”, yet they are not capable of strategic planning, which involves determining objectives, goals and strategies for a predetermined time frame to be implemented. While Kotler and Murphy’s (1981) understanding of strategic planning had a keen focus on marketing, with an orientation to understand consumer (or students to be more exact) needs and serving those needs, this focus had to be widened to encompass all stakeholders (Freeman, 1984) including students (and their families), academic and administrative personnel, graduates and their employers, and institutional and individual third parties who collaborate with the university in its primary services (that is, education and teaching, research and development, and community service). Identifying stakeholders and understanding their needs help universities to anticipate external threats and opportunities, while bringing forward the overlooked or marginalized constituencies into perspective (Burrows, 1999).

Ackoff (1990) differentiates between strategical and tactical planning, as the former planning, by nature, tends to require a top-down flow, as top management determines the long-term objectives (selection of ends) and how the system (that is, the organization) is affected by the ways of pursuing them. Tactical planning (the selection of means), on the other hand, has a short-term focus, and the means for reaching them affect only a part of the organization. Such a clear distinction between strategies and tactics may not be evident in the real world, as top management may not be aware of the details of the mundane operations that take place at the lower levels, as well as their relation to long term strategies.

For Sanaghan (2009), university strategic plans fall short because of the disconnectedness of internal stakeholders to the plan and its implementation, as a top-down process excludes campus stakeholders’ involvement in a meaningful way—that is, they may not have the “opportunity to share their ideas and aspirations, learn from others, and help influence the future goals and directions of the institution”. Sanaghan offers what he calls a Collaborative Strategic Planning (CSP) approach designed particularly for institutions of higher education that ensures meaningful engagement of internal and external stakeholders, transparency of information (to them) and flow of diverse ideas (among them), ownership of the planning process, reflection and making sense of the issues, discovery and learning, and community building.

In this chapter, strategic planning in higher education is studied in the context of an international research university located in three campuses in Turkey and Northern Cyprus, which followed different approaches until developing a participative and iterative strategic planning process.

BACKGROUND

In Turkey, the legal foundation for strategic planning in universities is laid by the Ministry of Development (MoD). Besides the Ministry, two important bodies play significant roles in strategic planning of the Turkish universities: The Council of Higher Education (CoHE), and CoHE Quality Council. CoHE is mainly responsible for strategic planning of higher education and coordination of universities in Turkey, while establishing and maintaining quality assurance mechanisms are undertaken by the CoHE Quality Council. The Public Finance Management and Control Law (No. 5018) dated January 1, 2015 obliges

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