

Strategic and participatory planning in the context of higher education: a case study**Procesos de innovación de las empresas de la ciudad de Sucre: la influencia del capital relacional**

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Abstract

Offering a space for reflection oriented to highlight the elements to facilitate the way to face its challenges and support the efficient management.

Strategic planning, IES, Participatory planning**Resumen**

Ofrecer un espacio de reflexión orientado a resaltar los elementos que faciliten el camino para enfrentar sus retos y apoyar la gestión eficiente.

Planificación estratégica, IES, planificación participativa

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Introduction

The context of continuous change is today the usual environment for all types of institutions. In the field of higher education, the demands that the knowledge society demands of the different education systems are evident. Among other consequences, this has increased the number of higher education institutions (HEIs), at all levels (worldwide, national, regional and local) and in all areas of knowledge (UNESCO, 2009).

This scenario entails a marked competition for students, teachers, research funds, and resources in general. In this sense, and given the context of budgetary restrictions, governments and institutions accentuate the rivalry between HEIs, through the financing they grant. The question is what and how HEIs are aware of this scenario, to face its challenges, achieve efficient management, and make the right decisions.

This work offers a space for reflection on the management process of strategic planning through participatory processes in HEIs.

The text is structured in four sections: firstly, some elements of strategic management in HEIs are pointed out (section I). Subsequently, the implications of the participatory planning methodology in the context of higher education are highlighted (section II). Next, the results of the case of the Faculty of Accounting and Administration of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí are analyzed, emphasizing the experience of the participatory planning process initiated in 2014 (sections III); and, finally, by way of conclusion (section IV), a reflection is made on the future challenges of strategic university management.

And participatory planning systems, in the current context to which HEIs are subjected.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education Institutions

Given the current forms or structures of organizations in which strategic planning is developed, it is common to observe a progressive decentralization of decisions, and the need arises to guide individual action and each organizational unit towards the objectives of the organization. (Wider, 2007).

This should promote the coordinated action of the different people and organizational units aligned with the objectives of the management (Porter, 2001).

Hence, for the development of the strategic management of an organization, the communication and participation of those involved is necessary in order to have useful information available for managers and directors (Thompson et al., 2008). Particularly, that information is required that constitutes the basis of planning and control through which the performance of the organization is evaluated, based on the scope of the objectives, both at a strategic and operational level.

Planning is a tool within the framework of organizational theories, which involves anticipating the future through strategies aimed at maximizing resources to achieve the mission and vision. HEIs have been encouraged to carry out planning processes by different institutions at the international level, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, the Organization for Economic Development Cooperation, the Inter-American Bank Development and the Economic Commission for Latin America, among others.

In Mexico, by the Federal Government through the National Development Plan 2013-2018. In addition, the evaluations of external organizations also promote the planning of HEIs; this is the case of the Interinstitutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education, the accreditation of programs that are carried out under the Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education and the National Center for the Evaluation of Higher Education.

Undoubtedly, this trend implies that planning and evaluation suppose a greater probability of accessing extraordinary funds through calls and programs derived from institutions such as the Ministry of Public Education, through different instances, for example, the Undersecretary of Higher Education, with the Program for Strengthening Quality in Educational Institutions (PROFOCIE) (DGESEU, 2014).

It is logical, then, that HEIs develop planning exercises in response to the demands of the environment to meet these expectations and increase their efficiency. For this purpose, it is useful to resort to participatory processes that include key actors, such as authorities, researchers, teachers, students, among others. This facilitates the establishment of goals linked to transparency and accountability and the involvement of the community in the execution of what is planned.

Participatory Planning as a Method of Strategic Management in HEIs

Linas-Audet *et al.*, (2011) obtain evidence from HEI planning exercises that reflect leadership in formulating the strategy by a small and hermetic management team.

This implies an incomplete vision of the strategy in the key areas of HEIs and poor communication between centralized information systems; In addition, the support units perform their functions incompletely by simultaneously executing their daily activities, thus contributing to the limited commitment and effectiveness of strategic planning.

In response to the above, Jiménez (2009), based on the ideas of Robbins (1999), states that the participation of the members of the organization in the planning and implementation of the plans has a positive impact on educational management. In addition, it improves the perception that the community has of the leaders and managers, which generates confidence in the decisions that are made, influencing the success of the actions that are undertaken. Active participation also promotes the perception of individual and collective achievement, which favors the work environment and in turn promotes greater collaborative work for the benefit of meeting institutional objectives.

Hence the importance of carrying out participatory planning exercises that make its implementation feasible and risk expanding the number of participants in the process in a controlled manner. The participatory planning process implies (Sevilla, Galaz & Arcos, 2008):

Enrichment of the planning content, thanks to the participation of the actors involved; Implementation of a plan through the people who collaborated in its formulation; Improvement in communication within the institution; Strengthening of collegiate life; Implementation of a culture of quality; and Attitude of continuous improvement.

In this regard, the aforementioned authors highlight the challenge of creating a governance mechanism that allows institutions to design effective mechanisms to determine priorities for the future and that these are credible, legitimate and accepted by their community.

Despite the clear benefits for organizations that make use of this method, based on the existing literature, it is concluded that the results of participatory planning exercises could suffer from the following weaknesses: Wear in the process and enormous institutional effort invested; Excessive attention to performance indicators on generated processes; Differences in the level and quality of participation of the academic communities in the planning process; Increase in quality gaps between institutions; Reduced consideration of differences between disciplines; Diversity of missions in HEIs that are not considered.

Results

Next, we present the case of the Faculty of Accounting and Administration (FCA), of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí (Mexico), a pioneer in the training of professionals in the administrative accounting area.

The participatory planning processes are delimited by the specific context of each HEI, its tradition and its culture. Currently, the FCA offers five careers at the undergraduate level: Administration, Public Accounting, Public Administration, Agribusiness and Strategic Marketing. The largest proportion of students are in the bachelor's degrees in Public Accounting (52%) and Administration (37%).

Based on the Institutional Development Plan of the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí (PIDE) 2013-2023, in February 2014, the direction of the faculty led the work for the construction of the Development Plan 2014-2023 with a strategic approach, participatory and systematic, covering the functions of teaching, research, dissemination of science, culture, extension and management. For this, different levels of interaction were established based on proposals prepared by the FCA Planning Commission (officials of the first management level) and enriched by all those responsible or leaders of key areas, as well as by the community. In general, through open consultations via the Internet. The planning process was structured in three phases.

First, it was oriented to analyze the context and diagnosis of the ACF. In addition to the planning team, teachers and administrators responsible for various areas participated by preparing diagnoses related to: The political and administrative organization of the State; demographics; The indices of social and educational backwardness; The educational and economic panoramas; The competitiveness; The OECD overview; and the analysis of postgraduate training, science, technology and innovation. Based on this analysis, the strengths, opportunities and challenges were identified, which were specified in relation to: Leadership, identity and social presence; Current and future educational offer; Quality of the educational offer; Academic plant and academic bodies; Educational practice and innovation; Research; bonding; Culture and art; Sport and health; Environmental perspective and sustainability; and Management and administrative structure. On this basis, the mission, values and principles were developed, as well as the vision for the year 2023 and its distinctive features.

In a second phase, work was carried out with more than thirty professors to develop policies, programs, objectives and strategies in order to specify the way to approach the aspects related to the diagnosis. Likewise, and as a fundamental part of any planning exercise, the indicators that serve to evaluate the results of the implementation of the plan were proposed.

As part of a third stage, the document in which the planning exercise was reflected was submitted to open consultation, via the web, mainly in relation to the objectives, programs and strategies. From this exercise, 444 written comments were collected, some with very specific proposals with which the final document was enriched. In addition, the activities carried out by the different student representations, including announcements on social networks, were used as support in the dissemination. For teachers and administrators, email and the use of printed media such as posters and banners were used.

Thus, with the participation of teachers, students, heads of areas, managerial and administrative staff, the Development Plan was obtained, which will need to be adapted to changes in the external context and internal conditions without changing its strategic purposes, in order to ensure validity for decision-making, through participatory planning processes, evaluation of its implementation and achievements.

Finally, derived from the Development Plan, the first work agenda was built (Agenda 2015) which includes the short-term activities that will allow the achievement of the PIDE by 2023.

Conclusions

These HEIs use strategic planning exercises with the intention of leading the institution to a good conclusion. Strategic management and planning are tools that the directors of any organization must master, in order to be able to navigate in an environment of uncertainty and risk. So there is an urgent need to break paradigms, resorting to the use of planning methods that involve, from the first stages, the entire community. This will facilitate greater community acceptance and action when strategies are implemented in line with the strategic course that management has set out.

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