

# Strategic Planning in Public Universities: A Developing Country Perspective

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Received: October 26, 2011

Accepted: December 20, 2011

Published: February 15, 2012

doi:10.5430/jms.v3n1p67

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jms.v3n1p67>

## Abstract

This paper presents the results of an empirical study on strategic planning in three public universities in Ghana. It assesses strategy development, the implementation process, the main challenges to strategic planning in public universities, and what their success factors are. Findings indicate that the nature, form, and sophistication of information and communication technology use influenced successful implementation of strategic plans for two public universities. Other results suggested that members of staff perceived strategic planning to be the responsibility of top management; thus, there is little ownership and commitment by academic and other stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Strategy, Strategic planning, Public universities, Tertiary education, Ghana

## 1. Introduction and Problem Statement

Strategic planning in public universities helps top management to align its resources in the most efficient manner necessary for the attainment of strategic milestones and stay competitive (Bain and Company, 2003). Strategic planning is a rigorous and critical brainstorming session used by university authorities to steer the affairs of the university. The utility that public authorities would gain from strategic planning would depend on the capabilities and social capital of the managers involved in the process, as this would provide university authorities with the urge to design effective organisational plans and appreciate the issues surrounding the quality of university services offered. Planning is one of the four managerial work processes in management. Additionally, the type of environment that a public university operates within would influence the type of plans designed (Hewlett, 1999). However, organizations that merely follow the classical planning process will not survive in fluid environments unless they think strategically.

David (2009) opines that the term strategic management is used synonymously with strategic planning. He defines strategic management as the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives. For Pearce and Robinson (2007), strategic management describes a set of decisions and actions that contribute to the formulation and implementation of plans designed to achieve a company's objectives. Hoskinson, Hitt, Ireland and Harrison (2008) note that activities carried out during the strategic management process are necessary for ensuring that a firm stays competitive and earns above average returns. For Bowman and Faulkner (1997), the strategic management process is an objective and systematic approach for making major decisions in organizations. In strategic management, an attempt is made to organize information in a way that allows effective decisions to be made under conditions of uncertainty suggesting that since the future is unknown organizations should avoid rationalizing a single correct strategy for the business (Pearce and Robinson, 2007).

A steady stream of recent management literature has encouraged business executives to subscribe to the practice of strategic planning. These advocates argue that the essence of strategic planning is to provide an organisation with a game plan whilst also enabling it to match its capabilities and competencies to competitive conditions of the external environment (David, 2009; Philips and Appiah-Adu, 1998). Thus the development of a well-conceived strategic plan