

STRATEGIC PLAN, DISTINCTIVE CAPABILITIES AND CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In the knowledge society, institutions of higher education are carrying out their role in a changing environment and moving through paths that are not exempt from complexities. One of the central aspects when performing academic activities is given by the strategic thinking and the ensuing need to generate strategic plans. These documents constitute one of the few written reports, sometimes available to the public, that allow to inquire about that which higher education institution leaders, together with their academic communities, present as a formulation of values that carries with it a mission, an internal and external analysis, together with a proposal to be implemented in a long-term horizon.

Within such plans, one of the most relevant topics is given by the institutional resources and capabilities, which conform the core of the organizations, as there are such aspects, especially of the intangible kind such as reputation, competence and distinctive capacities, that make it possible to build a set of organizational routines that allow institutions to differentiate themselves through the creation of value. Such distinctive capabilities constitute that group of characteristics or facets of an institution that tends to be unique and enable them to face their development in a particular manner through a value proposal oriented to the achievement of competitive advantages.

In organizations in general and particularly in higher education institutions, an essential aspect to implement strategic plans is the need to know the reality of the styles that predominate at their interior, which is known as the culture. In short, culture, understood as the system of beliefs, values, ways of thinking and acting that prevail in a team or organizational unit, is the element that, all along an academic institution, permeates the members of the organization and is represented in multiple actions, both routine or mostly operative and, in long-term situations. It is precisely in this last case that the need to inquire about the cultures that emerge in the institutions becomes of the highest relevance.

The culture inherits things of the past and specific ways to conceive situations when facing emerging challenges. However, the system of beliefs is not only felt at the interior of an institution but in turn, it projects towards its surroundings. In this sense, culture permeates the exterior in a particular manner, since each institution has its own system of beliefs. Culture also permeates the groups of interest that are linked with a higher education institution, such as local governments, service providing enterprises, professional associations, and groupings, among other collectives.

A rigorous analysis of resources and capabilities, with particular emphasis on the distinctive competence that a higher education institution has, will permit to face the surroundings with greater success by considering the teams of people that work within such institutions, who are those that possess the knowledge or, rather, the know-how.

Furthermore, without a correct analysis of the potential resources, especially of those that are intangible, and of the capabilities of the members of teams and the adequate knowledge of the culture, including the dimensions that conform it, it becomes difficult to achieve success in the performance of a higher education institution.

Without measurements and studies of both a qualitative and quantitative type, it will be difficult to approach a field of study in which aspects of diverse nature converge. That is, whose character spans from variables that are mainly of historical nature, appreciated through the collective psychological memory, perceived in emerging conflicts of affective and cognitive nature and, finally, to those of social character, as the institutions are part of systems surrounded by people who coexist in a community.

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