

PLANNING AND MONITORING: KEY PROCESSES FOR THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Higher education institutions currently face changing and dynamic environments that require faster and more adaptive responses to the new scenarios. Thus, it becomes essential to be able to count with strategic management tools that allow to adapt quickly to the new demands of the environment. Planning is a traditional tool with such characteristics, it has been validated in time and is usually employed by the majority of organizations, as it gathers the challenges that the institution expects to transcend in the short and medium terms, and whose objectives represent that which the community desires to accomplish in a given time frame.

Planning is the chart that guides the institutions around fundamental pillars that are present in the daily chores of the people, as are their vision, mission and goals, among other strategic guidelines. The strategic direction of the higher education institutions works imprinting its styles of management, of leadership and of quality in the processes that it carries out with the internal and external communities. In order to draw said chart there are diverse approaches, inherent to the implicit culture of each institution. Some of the approaches are more centralized, where the formulation of plans is generated from the apex of the organization, while others are more decentralized and democratic, where different levels are called to participate in its elaboration. It is precisely in this last approach where it is detected that the motivation and common sense orientation around shared goals achieve their greatest strength. It is precisely this last orientation that is needed by higher education institutions in order to achieve the quality standards required by society for the training of professionals.

For this reason and, given the relevance of the planning process, at present 100% of the universities belonging to the *Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas* (CRUCH) are implementing a process of strategic direction and, in 60% of them planning involves a five years horizon. This planning is within the frame of the quality standards required by the *Comisión Nacional de Acreditación* (CNA), so as to care for the evaluation of the self-regulation

mechanisms of the quality of these institutions, as well as of the results achieved.

It should be mentioned that planning becomes senseless if it is not accompanied by a results-monitoring system that allows monitoring of the progress towards the fulfillment of the goals set out. The traditional concept of planning, which was associated to a rather bureaucratic and static emphasis, must migrate towards a more dynamic and flexible approach that moves from the preoccupation about its formulation to the monitoring of what was planned. Moreover so, when the results of the planning process allow for the measurement of the quality of the institutional performance and, thus, of the training of professionals and the development reached by society.

Monitoring the planning process is fundamental in order to give account to the academic and administrative communities of the progress of the challenges established with the stakeholders that relate to the institution. Such monitoring has multiple facets, both quantitative and qualitative but, whatever the standpoint, what is important is to allow to give opportune signals to the directing staff in charge of making the transcendental decisions for the institution.

One of the great challenges for the strategic direction of higher education institutions is to have an adequate monitoring and control system, based on solid and transparent procedures for quality assurance that allow to provide information, in an effective and opportune manner, to the decision making process and to the community; this, with the purpose of guiding the steps of the institution and of collaborating, bidirectionally, with the stakeholders, in order to contribute with the training of the people, the development of the institutions and society, and to the growth of the countries.

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