

## EDITORIAL

### **The relevance of the strategic perspective in the universities management\***

Sometimes we do not see the wood for the trees. But, it can be even worse when the branch does not let see even the tree, thus the forest existence is simply a mystery.

In the case of management of educational institutions, it tends to be a recurring problem. Note that in contrast what happens in other organizations as large companies, in most cases, at the university the top managers are not necessarily in the sphere of administration and organization management or industrial engineering, but rather are the academics of different disciplines, elected by their peers, who arrive to that position fundamentally for their scientific merits and/or their political skills.

Certainly, this situation does not take away merit to managers or necessarily expose institutions to a strategic failure. Only it must be remembered that in universities legitimacy in the university government has different expressions and not only operates on the logic of bureaucratic rationality<sup>1</sup>, whereas is essential that top managers are able to generate and respect the strategic management processes.

In a context of expansion and massification of higher education system, in which universities have increased the number of students significantly, improving their budgets and economic situation; probably the exigencies of high professional skills to lead the university institutions have not been so necessary. At least, not as necessary as in other sectors where competitive hostility, the need to constantly innovate and the moderate market growth, have been part of the daily routine.

However, in Chile, in the last few years things seem to be changing and with the government's goal of gratuitousness for a significant proportion of students in higher education, requirements of efficiency and effectiveness will be certainly higher than in recent decades. Indeed, since the state has permitted fix reference tariffs that in most cases represent less than the real tariff values, *ceteris paribus*, a budgetary problem of high significance will be generated.

In conjunction with the aforementioned, the demands of Chilean quality assurance system have increased steadily in recent years, implying greater cost pressures on institutions to meet the dynamic standards that are systematically increase. Furthermore, the public funds demand increasing levels of competition among institutions and lead to assume academic and economic long-range commitments. Moreover, the reality of resources by contributions and research funds do not allow for significant growth projections of these items in the coming years<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the above, it will be increasingly indispensable to avoid common mistakes, that probably in times of expansion are easier to solve by existing budgetary gaps. Same mistakes, which in restriction times, can be very important of generating risks not only in development, but also on sustenance of universities<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Bernasconi and P. Clasing. "Legitimidad en el Gobierno Universitario: Una Nueva Tipología". Education policy analysis archives. Vol. 23 N° 71, pp. 26-36. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bernasconi. "La educación superior de Chile: Transformación, desarrollo y crisis". Ediciones UC. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> E. Rodríguez-Ponce y L. Pedraja-Rejas. "Dirección estratégica y calidad de las universidades: un estudio exploratorio desde Chile". Interciencia. Vol. 38 N° 1, pp. 35-41. 2013.

\* Proyecto Fondecyt N° 1140026.

At this point some recurring problems that usually appear in university organizations being raised, if the processes of strategic management as the core of development are not respected:

- **Politicization in decision-making**, the more immature are the institutions and lower the quality of their management team, the greater are the temptations of them to make decisions thinking more in political reasons, personal affinities and / or future votes to be elected or re- elected than gazing the purposes and institutional goals. The most serious problem occurs when academic teams of lower level are configured based on new contracts, which are lower quality to the minimum standard required to be part of a cloister of post graduates, mortgaging thus the present and the future of universities by tens of years.
- **Lack of strategic alignment between the design and implementation of the strategy**, While the designed strategy has an expression of deliberate strategy and another facet of emerging strategy, is no less true that this in no way implies that the implementation of the strategy skip or stop align with strategic design. First of all it is designed and then implemented. For example, it is inappropriate to discuss a structure without having previously defined a strategy. However, often turning their backs on the strategic direction tend to generate structures, systems of hierarchy, incentive systems, including regulations without respecting a strict alignment with the budgetary reality and corporate strategy itself.
- **Fictitious dichotomies**, academic cloisters have academics with a long career who have valuably contributed to build what are the institutions in a moment of time. These academics were the most suitable at the time, and many of them today are not necessarily qualified to compete for research projects or to systematically generate relevant publications. Respecting their academic dignity is essential, but from this reality is not possible to establish a dichotomy between teaching and research, since new hires must have quality to demonstrate their skills, not on the past but in the future. A future where a university professor must necessarily be a Doctor, be able to develop relevant publications systematically and to win projects of national or international research, with a proven ability and suitability to teach in the undergraduate and postgraduate programs, as well as the ability to project part of their work to the community.
- **Confusion about strategic, with tactical and operating**, for example: define the academic profile and minimum standards for preserving the quality of university professor is strategic decision for a university. In turn, outline the academic load of the year is a tactical decision to respond to the strategic guidelines, and assigning schedules and classrooms is a matter of operational level. Times and efforts for leadership and control should be consistent with the level of the task or decision in question. In reality, often discussions of regulations affecting the course of academics at the institution are initiated, without having defined institutional plants, nor the structure, nor the corporate strategy or turning their backs on all the major and strategic definitions and even the institutional budget.
- **Lack of a budget constraint**, all decisions in which there are limited resources and multiple needs carry a budget constraint. Incredibly there are occasions in which the budgetary control does not work with the precision and rigor due and institutions can fall into operational deficits, even in contexts of expansion as evidenced in multiple cases in the national system.

The times ahead for the Chilean university system are of greater demands on multiple fronts and dimensions. Therefore, the definition of clear and simple goals, with the ability of institutions to respond satisfactorily to the requirements of the environment, making an objective assessment of the resources and capabilities in the perspective of design strategies to build a sustainable competitive advantage, will make a big difference in the degree of strategic success of institutions in the coming years<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> R.M. Grant. "Contemporary Strategy Analysis". 9th edition. John Wiley & Sons. 2015.