

A Qualitative Study Of The Strategic Plans Of Three Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This research will use qualitative measures to determine differences in strategy between an Ivy-League Majority University, like the University of Pennsylvania, and two historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's). One of the HBCU's selected will be based on U.S. News & World Report as one of America's best black colleges. The other will be Delaware State University. The source of the data will be archival and would include interviews and surveys. The objective is to determine best practices in strategy and implementation that can be applied to institutions to gain competitive advantage. Another goal is to add to the body of research about higher education institutions.

Keywords: strategy; playscript; best practices; higher education institutions; competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

Research Question

This paper explores research questions related to the body of work that deals with strategy. Many of these issues were captured in a recent article by **Jacobides** in a Harvard Business Review paper (2010) titled “Strategy Tools for a Shifting Landscape” where he describes the strategic planning process as a “playscript” or a narrative that identifies the cast of characters, their inter-connectedness, the rules they observe, the plots and subplots in which they participate, and finally and most crucially, how they create and retain value for the long-term sustainability of the organization. The playscript is the mechanism for managing the complexity of the competitive environment, facilitating analysis and action, and bringing focus to the **causes** of change rather than the symptoms. Words are the medium for mapping out the targeted **logic** of success and the assumptions behind it rather than numbers or charts.

This research paper uses non-profit entities, rather than a firm or a for-profit enterprise, as the unit of analysis. The paper examines whether the strategic plans of three institutions adhered to the methodology that Jacobides recommends for a successful strategic plan. The rationale for the selection of the three institutions was to understand whether there are differences between an Ivy-League Majority University and each of two Historically Black Colleges and Universities in their strategic plans and their planning processes. Another motivation was to understand “best practices”.

The first university, one of the top ranked Ivy-League, Majority Universities is the University of Pennsylvania; the second is Howard University, one of the highest ranked Historically Black Colleges and Universities, ; and the third is Delaware State University, also an HBCU ranked among the middle of the HBCU's. Some questions that will be addressed relate to the differences between an Ivy-League Majority University (ILMU) and a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and the differences between a top ranked HBCU and a mid ranked HBCU. While the ILMU is very different from the HBCU in their target population of students, the choice of the three universities was deliberate since the objective was to understand not only how a successful Ivy League school develops its strategic plan, but also to identify best practices. All three institutions have long histories so they should have nailed down by now the basics of creating and retaining value for long-term sustainability.

The research question is twofold: 1) to determine whether the components of the “playscript” are reflected in the strategic plans of the three institutions and 2) to identify whether following the rules of the playscript led to some aspects of success or failure for the three institutions. Success or failure was based on press reports, interviews, and personal accounts of the achievement of goals laid out in the respective strategic plans. Emphasis was measured in qualitative rather than quantitative factors because the central thrust of the paper was to analyze the relationship between the strategic planning process and success.

The methodology used was content analysis. All information used is publicly available from the Internet, news reports, and other archival sources. For the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), the time frame of the strategic plan was from 1995 to 2002; for Howard University, the plan ranged from 1995 to 2001; and for Delaware State University (DSU), the plan ranged from 2007 to 2011. Although the DSU plan finishes in 2011, assessment was based on documentation up to the current time period.

Overview Of Three Universities

In 1749, Benjamin Franklin presented his vision of a school to be known as the “Publick Academy of Philadelphia” to teach both the ornamental knowledge of the arts and the practical skills necessary for making a living. This was an innovative model of higher education at the time since the four colleges in existence, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and William and Mary were all schools for educating the clergy. This university eventually became the University of Pennsylvania. Howard was established in 1866, first as a seminary for the education of African-American clergymen but shortly thereafter as a university. Within two years of its inception, the University began Colleges of Liberal Arts and Medicine. Delaware State University was established in 1891 as the **State College for Colored Students** under the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1890. This Act enabled land grant colleges for blacks to come into existence in states maintaining separate educational facilities.

These three universities were established more than one hundred years ago. Racial and funding inequities, as well as the populations targeted are major factors in the performance of HBCU’s relative to Ivy League universities. However, there are underlying reasons why the performance of ILMU’s is different from that of HBCU’s. This study does not attempt to explain the reasons for all the differences, but it would be useful to understand how the three institutions studied differ in laying out their visions and plans to achieve and sustain value for the future. If endowment is used as just one of the measures of success Penn’s was \$5.2 billion as of late 2009, Howard’s was \$404.1 million, and DSU’s was \$20.8 million.

An Overview Of The Strategic Planning Literature

There are currently three leading theories or views of strategic management; the industry-based, the resource-based, and the institution-based views. Strategy, as a discipline, is fairly young and research is constantly being done to test and bolster the prevailing views.

The industry-based view was the first to be recognized by consultants and industry analysts as a tool for organizing facts and figures to devise long term strategies for businesses. It is associated with the work of Michael Porter in the 1980s and his five-forces model. The five forces that firms were concerned with in developing their competitive strategy were as follows: (a) the threat of substitute products and services; (b) the threat of entry of new competitors; (c) the intensity of competitive rivalry; (d) the bargaining power of customers (e) and the bargaining power of suppliers. The five forces were based on an analysis of the firm’s environment and the patterns of competition. The model did not delve into details of the characters involved and was definitely not word or narrative-oriented. In other words, the model did not lend itself to the kind of qualitative descriptions that Jacobides is suggesting for successful planning strategies.

The resource-based view recommends that firms concentrate on accumulating valuable, rare, and hard-to imitate resources and capabilities to achieve strategic advantages over their competitors. A valuable resource is one that enables a firm or organization to either outperform its competitors or reduce its weaknesses (Barney, 1991; Amit and Schoemaker, 1993). “Valuable” also means that the transaction costs for investing in the resource must be less than the discounted future above-average returns from the investment (Conner, 1992, p131; Mahoney and Prahalad, 1992). For example, the transaction costs for investing in alumni organizations should be significantly lower than the returns that emanate from such investments.

For a resource to be of value, it must also, by definition, be rare. According to Barney (1986a), Dierickx and Cool (1989), and Barney (1991), the price of a resource must be greater than the discounted future above-average returns. The best example of such a rare resource is the reputation that a university garners over time which results in its high ranking, 15th, among the top 100 universities in the world. It took decades of careful brand building and enormous resources to get the name recognition that Penn currently enjoys but the payoff from nurturing this resource far exceeds the initial cost.

In-imitability is another key criterion for the resource-based view. An example in the context of higher education institutions is having internationally recognized faculty. Such an asset is knowledge-based or socially complex and has causal ambiguity because it is idiosyncratic to the institution in which it resides (Peteraf, 1993; Mahoney and Pandian, 1992; Barney, 1991). In-imitability, in this context, refers to the coveted position that faculty enjoys at an institution such as Penn.

Resources that are rare, value-creating, and in-imitable, must also be non-substitutable (Dierickx and Cool, 1989; Barney, 1991). It is difficult to substitute top notch scholars who are internationally recognized in their field. They are heavily sought after based on their high levels of citations and the status achieved in their field. Goodall A.H. (2009), in her well-researched book “Socrates in the Boardroom” makes the case about university presidents that might also be applicable to faculty such as Penn’s. University presidents should be more scholarly than managerial because scholars are more *credible* leaders; they bring *expert knowledge* about the core business of universities; they act as *standard bearers* in that they first set the standard to be enforced; and as leaders of the university, they send a *signal* to the faculty that they share their scholarly values. These qualities are instilled over time and become embedded in the culture of the institution and thus are difficult to substitute.

The four characteristics of the resource-based view (being valuable, rare, hard to imitate and non-substitutable) emphasize the internal resources of an institution. The criticism against this view is that resources in one context may become non-valuable, plentiful, and easy-to-imitate in another context. This is not relevant to the type of institution in this study since the most important asset, highly acclaimed faculty, is a major source of strategic value for higher education whatever the context.

The institution-based view, or as Peng, M.W., Sun S.L., Pinkham, B., and Chen, H. (2009) described it, the “third leg for a strategy tripod,” takes into account the influence of the “environment.” Interactions among institutions and organizations are the real context in which firms operate. The industry-based and the resource-based views consider them as “background”, according to Peng et al. In a realistic environment there are formal institutions such as laws and regulations, as well as informal institutions, such as cultures and norms. These forces are fundamental in determining strategic choices which result from dynamic interactions between institutions and organizations. The institution-based view paints a broader picture or context within which the organization operates.

All three models provide ideas relevant to planning strategy. The institution-based view emphasizes the context and evolution of institutions and their impact on strategy. The other two views focus on “best practices” based on competitive advantage and market analysis. Jacobides’s thesis does not suggest that any of these views or models lack substance. His approach embraces a more stylistic approach that incorporates ideas discussed above but ends up with a process that is more understandable and user-friendly for all participants. This is exemplified in the following statement that, “in an age when nothing is constant, strategy should be defined by narrative – plots, subplots, and characters – rather than by maps, graphs, and numbers” (Jacobides, 2010). Before describing his playlist in more details, it is important to discuss how the non-profit sector has made use of concepts from the strategy literature.

Strategy In The Non-Profit Sector

Despite differing views of what strategy is or should be, the common thread for profits and non profits is about adding value. Qualitative criteria such as reputation and trust play a greater role in securing competitive advantage for non-profits than they do for profit-driven enterprises. Non-profits compete for resources and market share like any other entity. “The same competition for resources, customers, fund balances (profits) and endowments exist, and higher education is facing the same demands from its customers, students and parents, as well as from its

revenue sources, state legislatures, alumni, and of course the paying public” Aleong (2001). The question is: do non-profits use the same strategic planning concepts and models as the for-profit enterprises? The usual route seems to be to adapt current models such as Michael Porter’s five-forces model by replacing the bargaining power of buyers with that of user and funding groups (Oster, 1995). Some common findings for non-profits are: reputation is the major entry barrier; government regulation controls entry in many markets; and the existence of specific assets discourages entry by raising exit costs. For example, university facilities cannot be sold easily or used as collateral to repay bank loans.

There is a lack of models grounded within the non-profit paradigm as Aleong (2001) argued and Halcro (2008) reiterated. Others have commented that it is easier and quicker to apply existing strategic thinking than to develop new models as pointed out by Halcro (2008), and other authors she cited such as Brown & Kalegaonkar (2002), Guo (2007), Morris (2007), and Myers and Sacks (2003). While Oster’s recommendation is to adapt Michael Porter’s model for non-profits, the data suggest that the resource-based view has been adopted widely as suggested by Aleong in 2001 and Brown and Iverson in 2004. At the end of the day, adding value is the common thread for profit and non-profit enterprises alike. Having established that, the paper will try to uncover whether the storyline or narrative format when integrated into the strategic planning process leads to greater success. Jacobides’s playlist might be useful in bridging the gap from theory to application and the research findings show that successful organizations are already following this style.

The Playlist As A Strategy Tool

Before getting into the methodology it is important to give more details about Jacobides’s schemata for planning and analysis. The two types of playlists are the **corporate playscript**, which describes the **logic** by which value is generated and appropriated by central authorities in an organization and the **business playscript** which is the driver for more value generation by the organization. The **corporate** playscript has two subplots, the *synergies* subplot and the *financial* subplot. The *synergies* subplot tracks how different parts of the organization reinforce one another. For example, the central administration adds value by managing relationships among colleges, departments, and other subparts by developing strategies that enable executives to articulate ways to add value by building reputation and increasing endowments. Another role of top administration is to establish and nurture the network that enables the organization to navigate a rapidly changing landscape. The *financial* subplot emphasizes how assets and capital should be utilized most effectively to generate returns. It is the foundation for determining how much leeway the synergies subplot enjoys. The efficient and effective use of assets and capital lays the infrastructure for the rest of the organization to have the wherewithal to accomplish its plans.

The **business** playscript highlights the main actors, their motives, and their roles and identifies and reinforces the links between the organization and the operating rules of the business. It provides the context or background in which the organization operates. It characterizes how players in a sector generate and capture value. Jacobides considers this to be the more important of the two playscripts because it is the force for generating more value. An example of this will be developed in the discussion of the Penn plan.

METHODOLOGY

Whorf (1956) stated that language serves as a basis for communicating common values and identities. The premise of this paper is to analyze the language used in the strategic plans and to determine whether organizations used the narrative or storyline that Jacobides describes. The content of the language of the strategic plans was studied to ascertain whether the ideas, policies, and language resembled aspects of the playscript. For example, did it explain the changes in the institution and the roles that it and others should play? Did the plans develop aspects of the **corporate** and **business** playscripts showing how value can be generated and appropriated and how more value can be generated? Was it possible to link success of the strategic plan and of the institution with how well the institution integrated their narrative format with plots and subplots? The documents used were publicly available strategic plans for the University of Pennsylvania, Howard University and Delaware State University. The plans were analyzed for key words, phrases, and paragraphs that relate to items described above in the *playscript*.

Several criteria were used for coding the documents of the three institutions. The categories were as follows: (1) Did they **define** their sector or market niche and playscript; (2) Did they explain how they would **reinvent** their strategy by rewriting their playscript; and (3) Did they indicate how they would **future-proof** their playscript. Examples of specifics of each of these questions are as follows: **Define** – Who are the main characters in the sector? What are the rules, the institutional context, that link the characters? How does each institution plan to add value? **Reinvent** – What role or niche can they capture that no one has taken? How would they maintain competitive advantage? **Future-proof** – How is the industry evolving and what can the university do about it? How can they reinforce their position?

The coders were the author of this paper, a researcher with several publications related to the area of strategy; a doctoral student with a strong knowledge of strategic planning as well as linguistics; and an English major with in depth knowledge of English Grammar and English.

FINDINGS

Inter-Coder Reliability And Validity

The coders evaluated the strategic plans and came to similar conclusions. The Kappa statistic ($K=.8$) indicated a strong positive relationship among the three raters indicating high inter-rater agreement. The high inter-rater reliability is critical for the interpretations of the content analysis to be considered meaningful. Neuendorf (2002) stated that the goal of content analysis is to identify and record relatively objective characteristics of messages. This was achieved since the raters followed well defined criteria that were pre-determined.

On the question of validity, or the degree to which the study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the study is attempting to measure, the results suggest a high correlation between the strategic planning process and success of the institution. The researcher set out to measure whether strategy should be defined by narrative in the form of plots, subplots, and characters that demonstrate how value would be attained and sustained. The overall finding is that the strategic plan that followed the *playlist* guidelines described by Jacobides demonstrated greater success than the institutions that did not.

The University Of Pennsylvania (Penn)

The University of Pennsylvania's plan was titled "Building on Excellence: The Next Agenda" ("University of Pennsylvania's Strategic Framework"). The first heading, "Planning our Strategy for a New Century" immediately captured what the stakeholders were about to embark on and the thread of the entire plan was a narrative incorporating Jacobides's main topics; the cast of characters, their inter-connectedness, the rules they observe, and the plots and sub-plots in which they participate.

First, the successes from the preceding plan of 1995-2002 were reviewed. There it was articulated that the university would become one of the premier research and teaching universities in the nation and the world. To achieve that goal the university initiated a step by step process. Building the university-wide strategic plan from the ground up, called "Agenda for Excellence" was the first step. This was followed by six academic priorities, the diversity priorities, and finally the individual school strategic plans. The goals and priorities from the prior plan were reiterated, indicating closure and was thus used as a jumping off point for continuity. They read as follows:

- Academic rankings have risen
- Student selectivity has improved
- Faculty accomplishments and recognition have increased
- Research funding has dramatically expanded
- Administrative restructuring has yielded greater efficiency and effectiveness
- Revitalization of the West Philadelphia community has accelerated, and
- Fundraising efforts have strengthened considerably.

These accolades set the tone for the rest of the plan, “Yet, with all this success, we cannot afford to be complacent”. “We [...] seek to explore those frontiers of knowledge where the institution’s faculty and resources can make a tangible difference for generations to come.” It continues reading like an ongoing narrative or a storyline as expressed with the following quote “fulfillment of these responsibilities requires **a continuous and thoughtful dialogue throughout the university**, both about our academic and educational agendas and the operational and financial capacities required to achieve them”.

The process for developing the 1995 – 2002 was extensive and inclusive. To demonstrate the stages of the deliberative and thoughtful process, in November 2000 the University Trustees met to kick off the development of the next plan; in spring 2001, the Council of Deans, the Academic Planning and Budget Committee, the President’s Advisory Group, and the Executive Vice President’s senior management team determined the goals and priorities. This became the tentative outline and framework for the next step, the establishment of 14 committees, consisting of two hundred faculty, staff, undergraduate, and graduate students from across the University to work on major areas of the plan. In the fall of 2001 the committees met. Finally in February an Open Forum was held to solicit input from the University community.

The following excerpts demonstrate the importance of the role that participants play plus their interconnectedness not only to current stakeholders but to those that preceded them. The introduction reads as follows: “Penn and the other great universities play a singular and distinctive role in shaping the future of society, in this country and the world.” Also, “we are energized not only by the concrete achievements of the past seven years, but also by the rich legacy of our predecessors and the enormous institutional strengths they have bequeathed us.”

The unifying theme is demonstrated by the following: “The University of Pennsylvania gains strength from the special character of its component parts and synergies among those parts.” The historical underpinnings and institutional saga are found on most of Penn’s websites. It goes as follows: “The University of Pennsylvania’s roots reach deeply into the history of American higher education. Founded as the Charity School of Philadelphia in 1740 and chartered as the first non-sectarian college in 1755, the College of Philadelphia was guided, as the University is today, by its founder Benjamin Franklin’s admonition to “learn everything that is useful and everything that is ornamental.” Participants in the strategic planning process know that their role adds to a rich legacy of the past 255 years but that Penn has to adapt itself to the changing nature of higher education, the changing demands of society, and the expanding knowledge base of the modern era.

The business playscript, which, according to Jacobides, characterizes how players in a sector will generate and capture value, is encapsulated in the assets that places Penn at the forefront of American and international scholarship, education, and professional life. They are its world-class faculty; the diversity of its people and ideas; its interdisciplinary environment; its urban context; and its entrepreneurial and engaged spirit.

To “reinvent and future-proof their playscript,” the plan elaborated on and developed four strategic objectives. They are as follows:

1. Solidify Penn’s position as one of the premier research and teaching institutions in the nation and in the world.
2. Build upon our special strengths to develop five selected academic priorities that will differentiate Penn among international research universities of the first rank
3. Adapt our educational and alumni offerings to the learning needs of current and future generations
4. Develop the physical, financial, operational, and entrepreneurial capacities to sustain our academic excellence.

The strategic objectives lay the foundation for the future as recommended by Jacobides. For example, the insistence on sustaining excellence is reflected in the emphasis on attracting and retaining outstanding faculty by strengthening faculty in key areas as well as mentoring and retaining members of junior and senior professorial ranks. Their goal was to anticipate competitive recruitment before it occurs. One very important fact that the university community was reminded of was that it must establish and project a clear institutional identity and must guard against a leveling effect that could diminish its best schools and departments. It was crucial either to bring those programs up to acceptable levels of excellence or reconsider their role or existence.

To summarize the findings on Penn from the content analysis, all the raters agreed that the plan developed a compelling narrative or storyline with the three main areas addressed, defining their sector; reinventing their strategy; and finally future-proofing their strategy, all in the form of a playscript or narrative rather than in numbers and graphs. The corporate and business playscripts as well as synergies and financial subplots were threaded throughout the discussion with their stakeholders. The plan was an excellent example of what Jacobides might have had in mind.

In conclusion, in terms of definition, re-invention, and future proofing their strategy, Penn continued to build on its tradition for excellence by solidifying its position as one of the premier research and teaching institutions in the nation and in the world. It did so by identifying its strategic objectives and putting in place the actors, their motives, and their roles to facilitate the process of adding and capturing value. The results of their efforts will be discussed in a later section.

FINDINGS: HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Howard University's executive summary of its strategic plan began with, as visionary, an overview as that of Penn's ("Howard University's Strategic Framework in Action"). While Penn discussed academic excellence in the nation and in the world, Howard discussed providing the nation with leadership for America and continuing Howard's historic mission of considering great questions and educating leaders emboldened by their Howard experiences to take on the task of finding solutions to those questions. The president developed the institutional vision by describing Howard as the national repository of the African-American cultural experience; the center of African-American thought, critical analysis, and leadership.

While the executive analysis was very inspiring, the results of the content analysis were that every aspect of the strategic plan; the mission, vision statement, core values, etc. was less comprehensive, imaginative, and far-sighted, when compared to Penn's rich, exciting, and stimulating invitation to contribute, be involved, and participate. The plan highlighted the uniqueness of Howard University as one that must engender and nurture an environment that celebrates African-American culture in all its diversity. The four strategic areas emphasized were strengthening academic programs and services; promoting excellence in teaching and research; increasing private support; and enhancing national and community service. It was a plain vanilla strategic plan. It lacked the passion, enthusiasm and fervor that the Penn plan engendered. There were none of the outstanding or interesting characteristics for a narrative or storyline.

A major problem was the lack of involvement of players in a fervent and zealous manner. The Penn plan laid out the players who were members of the many committees consisting of alumni, faculty, staff and top management. Howard named their famous alumni but did not discuss the grass roots planning and synchronization required to make their plan a success by naming committees or incorporating their stakeholders in the process. The plan read like a formal discussion of various components related to the faculty, the infrastructure, the fund for academic excellence etc. It did not read as a passionate call for participation of players in the process.

In terms of defining, reinventing, and future-proofing its sector, the major thrust was toward the African-American cultural experience. This is very important, but with all universities encouraging diversity, in the long run, it is the reputation of the academic programs and of the faculty that will sustain the value of the institution. This theme is present but is not developed in a compelling manner. The lackluster roadmap of how to sustain or future-proof the corporate and business playscripts for capturing and retaining value led to the inevitable as will be discussed later.

FINDINGS: DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY (DSU)

The strategic plan for DSU failed to describe the rich legacy and heritage that the university has as one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It seemed to be straddling the fence between (a) wanting to emphasize the HBCU heritage, the African-American niche that is central to the institution, and (b) catering to Delawareans of all races ("Delaware State University Strategic Plan," 2007). The university is situated in the middle of the state of Delaware and despite its geographic location has more than 95% of an African American student

population. The theme of the new president at the time centered around moving away from the HBCU mission of the university to one that would compete with surrounding universities, thus attracting different target populations such as families from low socioeconomic backgrounds and farmers with limited resources. While in reinventing and future-proofing the strategy it was important to appeal to a wider market, the plan was not successful in transitioning stakeholders by emphasizing the rich reputation of the university but moving it gradually to encompass a broader market. This new direction plus the attitude of the president alienated a large number of stakeholders. Thus it did not encourage the deep-seated loyalty and passion that the Penn plan promoted. Stakeholders had a difficult time visualizing the future because they began fighting against the changes and against the attitude of the new president. The opportunity to steer the direction of the university such that it would encompass more segments of the population was lost amidst the din of criticism that ensued. Thus the rich history was not used as a springboard for bigger and better growth. Neither Penn nor Howard shied away from their past and in fact used it to develop their competitive advantage.

Other advantages were highlighted such as “highly favorable student-teacher ratio and an inviting campus environment; and attractive tuition and quality academic programs”. However, the goals and objectives were laid out in broad terminology without explanations of how they would be accomplished. One example of this is as follows, “to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all programs”. No explanation is given in the plan as to how this would be accomplished; nor does it develop the narrative, story line, or the cast of characters responsible for implementing the strategic goals. The expectation was that the details would be fleshed out afterwards. Emphasis on how to reinvent its strategy or how to sustain its competitiveness was very vague. This is in stark comparison to the wealth of information given in the Penn plan and the grass-roots planning that took place before the plan was approved.

The DSU plan was very sketchy with broad goals and objectives. It did not mention or incorporate players, nor did it develop a roadmap as to how the goals would be achieved. It was a tops-down plan. The expectation was that top administration would form committees to flesh out how the strategic goals would be implemented; who would be the responsible parties; and the deadlines for accomplishment. This is the stark difference with the Penn plan which included all of the above and thus got buy-in from the grass-roots.

Another major difference of DSU’s plan relative to Penn’s is the appeal for ownership. DSU avoids the pronoun “we”, and instead uses “its” or “it” projecting a cold and distant brand image. Howard mixes its pronoun use from “I” to “we” to “its”. The Penn plan uses the pronoun “we”, or words like “partnership”, “interdisciplinary”, “open forum” or “feedback” etc. There is always mention of a team of participants including alumni asking for buy-in, feedback, cooperation and collaboration. The same cannot be said for DSU.

In conclusion, in terms, of definition, re-invention, and future proofing their strategy, DSU did not seem to be sure of what their niche was. They were straddling several fences, HBCU versus majority institution, research versus teaching, national versus international etc. They seemed to be trying to be everything to everyone. The plan was tops down with the details expected to be fleshed out later. As a result it did not harness the enthusiasm required by the major players to generate and capture value, the results of which will be discussed later.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE THREE INSTITUTIONS

Each of these strategic plans had executive summaries written by their presidents at the time. As James J. Duderstadt (2007), former president of the University of Michigan, stated in his book “The View from the Helm: Leading the American University during an Era of Change,” a university president needs to discover, respect, and build on the saga of an institution – its history, traditions, and values – both in developing a vision for the future of the university and in leading it toward these goals.” There were stark differences in each of these cases of how the saga of the institution was addressed. For Penn, the reader could almost visualize Benjamin Franklin, the university’s founder, calling out the troops to “generate knowledge that is unconstrained by traditional boundaries and spans the continuum from fundamental to applied.” The language of the plan exudes pride in its tradition and history and is a rousing reminder to stakeholders to keep up the good work and move on to new levels of excellence. The executive summary of the Howard plan includes a call from the then president to continue its vision given its rich history as “the national repository of the African-American cultural experience; the center of African-American

thought, critical analysis and leadership”. Howard’s plan builds on the saga of the institution but not in as impassioned a manner as Penn’s. The DSU’s plan is the least passionate about its history, traditions, and values. It mentions being a historically black institution but the language is very lukewarm. The basic philosophy section discusses that it is a land-grant institution and that it is committed to excellence but it fails to arouse excitement and emotion.

MATCHING THE PLAYSRIPT/PLAN WITH THE SUCCESS OF THE INSTITUTIONS

In summary, the playscript as a tool for developing strategic choices was not followed with the same success by the three institutions. The results of the plans indicate that there is a high correlation between the plans and the results. The University of Pennsylvania, under the helm of the president from 1994 to 2004, experienced unprecedented growth and development. According to public documents, all of the strategic goals were achieved. Some of these were as follows: transformed Penn’s academic core; enhanced the quality of life on campus and in the surrounding community; doubled its research funding; tripled its annual fundraising and the size of its endowment; launched a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization program; was instrumental in raising Penn’s rankings from 16th to 4th among top national research universities, (according to U.S. News and World report rankings). The list is extensive and is understandable given the wealth of information in the narrative of the strategic plan proposed.

In the case of Howard University, the president was asked to resign by the faculty senate because the school was in a state of crisis and the faculty felt that that it was time to end “an intolerable condition of incompetence and dysfunction at the highest level”(AAPPundit, 2007). According to interviews conducted by current faculty at Howard, the goals of the strategic plan were not accomplished and the university is currently going through a new process of developing a new strategic plan.

Delaware State University developed a strategic plan which is currently being revamped by the new president. During the last president’s tenure, the university straddled the fence in determining what DSU’s niche was. Although more than 95% of the student population was and is African-American, the president at the time did not express pride in the institution as an HBCU and thus denied it its institutional heritage. He antagonized key stakeholders among alumni, politicians, and faculty, and thus wasted precious time in not moving the institution forward. There was an atmosphere of embattlement rather than one of unison with stakeholders to support his policies. The plan cannot be said to have been a success.

LIMITATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research on strategic planning will continue to be vibrant and interesting, but inconclusive given its very nature. Jacobides’s ideas seem to have legitimacy in the three case studies analyzed in this study. However, because of the very nature of case study research, one cannot make inferences about the larger population. The research will continue with more case studies, improvements, and suggestions for new or adaptations to the current theories, views, or prevailing opinions.

There are several questions for further research arising from this paper, but the two that emerge are 1) one from the Jacobides’s paper and (b) another that is more general. The first relates to the best way to capture the difference in meaning between a reinvented strategy and a future-proofed one. As used in the analysis, both concepts seem synonymous since they are future related, but are they really the same? The second question revolves around the question as to how a strategic planning team can best avoid or manage the tension present in reinventing an institution’s strategy and keeping its unique brand image.

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