Strategic Planning in Institutions of Higher Education: A Case Study of Sakarya University

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Abstract

A participatory and transparent management understanding, the effective and efficient use of resources, performance-based assessment and budgeting as well as the rapid developments experienced in informatics and communication technologies have obliged institutions of higher education to prepare their strategic plans both due to a legal obligation (Law No. 5018) and in order to realize their institutional transformation.

Sakarya University, which aims to materialize excellence as an institutional culture and which is continually improving and developing itself for this purpose, set off for its journey of excellence with the ISO activities in 2001 for the improvement of its administrative and support services and since 2003, it has been carrying on it with the Total Quality Management activities at the level of all academic and administrative units. This study deals with the strategic planning studies of Sakarya University that it launched with the slogan “Our vision will be our future”.

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1. Introduction

Meeting the expertise required by the modern life with the advanced research made in line with the rapid developments in science and technology upon globalization is possible through the studies by institutions of higher education.

Training manpower equipped with superior qualifications that countries require, making scientific studies and ensuring that their results are shared in international information platforms, bringing in scientists who will make research & development studies, presenting the results to be obtained from the studies for the benefit of the society and contributing to the acquisition of social, economic and cultural values are the basic tasks of institutions of higher education.

The development of management function in institutions, the fact that the work and procedures performed have become complicated and the need to see the current situation and the point intended to reach as a whole have made planning indispensable. The importance of strategic planning is increasing in institutions day by day so as to plan the work, to set the goals, targets and the methods to make it possible to attain them, to prepare a budget in line with the goals and targets set, to classify the resources according to the priority of targets and to provide participative management.

The technological developments, requirements of information economy, the need for alliances with national and international universities, an increase in competition with other universities, an increase in the number and diversity of students, a reduction in financial support by the state to institutions of higher education upon an increase in the number of universities and the need to increase customer/employee/stakeholder relationships and satisfaction brought forward the updating of course contents and programs according to the changing needs. As a result, it became indispensable to implement strategic management in institutions of higher education.

In the Public Financial Management and Control Law No. 5018 dated 10.12.2003, a strategic plan is defined as “a plan that encompasses the medium- and long-term goals of public administrations, their basic principles and policies, their targets and priorities, their performance criteria, the methods to be followed in order to attain them and the distributions of resources”. In the law, the public administrations have been assigned the task of preparing a strategic plan with participatory methods in order to establish their mission and vision about the future, set strategic goals and measurable targets, measure their performance in line with predetermined indicators and monitor and evaluate the implementation within the framework of development plans, programs, the related legislation and the basic principles they have adopted (SPO, 2006).

SAU had envisaged this need far before the legal regulations that were made and it set off for its journey of excellence in line with the Total Quality Management activities in March 2003. Since 2003, important steps have been taken and achievements have been made to make excellence widespread as a life culture at SAU and to continually improve the services provided and the administrative approaches.

2. Literature

The finding of answers to questions “What is the institution?”, “What does it do and why?” and “What does it want to do in the future?” so as to attain the targets set through adaptation to the competitive conditions of the globalizing world and the systematization of how to attain the targets set are only possible through well-planned strategies.

Strategic planning is one of the primary objects of an institution. It involves the identification, implementation and monitoring of strategies of the institution which define the behavior of the institution under changing and indefinite environmental conditions. In this concept executives should define
institutions’ mission, vision and basic values and set strategies which help institutions reach their goals in the light of these (Arslankaya and KorkusuzPolat, 2010).

Strategic planning is the designing of an institution’s future by analyzing its present situation, the analysis of those targets which it wants to attain in the future and how it will attain these targets and the effective and efficient use of its resources to this end. While strategic goals and targets can be followed with the understanding of strategic planning, both unity of target between the units is formed and their priorities for employees are determined.

Strategic planning is described as generating the future mission and vision of the institution in a dynamic environment and changing surroundings, determining strategic objectives and measurable targets, measuring the performances by predetermined indicators and monitoring and evaluating this process. It is a participative approach which enables the budget of an institution to be in accordance with the aims and targets in the strategic plan from a forward looking point of view and gives priority to resource allocations (Arslankaya and KorkusuzPolat, 2010).

In literature there are several definitions on strategic planning. Strategic planning is management of the decisions and activities which define a company’s long-run performance (Wheelen and Hunger, 2003). McNamara (2006) defines strategic planning as determining where the company will be next year or the following years, how they will go there and whether it will go there or not.


3. A Journey of Excellence by SAU

SAU, which is outstanding with its rapid development among the universities established after 1990 and which has rapidly completed its academic and technical infrastructures, is the sole state university that obtained the TSE-EN-ISO 9002: 1994 certificate of quality assurance with its administrative units in 2001 (it updated the certificate in 2003 and 2009) and it is a role model for many universities, with its laboratory, education and social services internet infrastructure and its advances in the sector of informatics.

The preparations for a Strategic Plan were initiated with the Total Quality Management activities launched at Sakarya University in March 2003. Within the framework of these activities, quality delegates were determined from all units on the basis of the principle of voluntariness and the Committee of Quality Delegates of the Academic Assessment and Quality Committee of Sakarya University (SAUDEK) was composed.

When drawing up the mission & vision, basic values and policies within the framework of the quality activities initiated in March 2003, recommendations were obtained from all academic and administrative personnel, ranging from the lowest- to the highest-ranking employees, by means of the quality delegates. The recommendations obtained were addressed one by one in the Committee of Quality Delegates of SAUDEK, they were submitted for the approval of the Rectorate and the Senate and the mission, vision, basic values and policies of the University were established.

Considering the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analyses made in the units under the leadership of the quality delegates, the Strengths & Weaknesses and the Opportunities & Threats of SAU were determined. By taking the results of the SWOT analyses into consideration, the first strategic plan of the university was drawn up in 2004. In this plan, some 21 strategic goals were stipulated and, in order to realize these strategic goals, targets were set in three different groups, i.e. general targets, functional targets and unit targets (general targets: those targets which concern the university in general in
order to realize the strategic goals; functional targets: those targets which are set as the targets of the units in order to realize strategic targets on the basis of the SWOT analysis by the top management; and unit targets: those targets which are set by the academic and administrative personnel in the units of the university. For details, see Table 1). The Strategic Plan has been realized with Institutional Self-Assessment since 2004 and it is revised every year.

Table 1: Examples of targets included in Strategic Plan 2004 of SAU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional targets</th>
<th>Strategy concerned</th>
<th>Other functional targets that are not measured by performance indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>To examine the courses applied in various programs in the units of the university and to combine or decompose those which resemble in terms of name and content by June 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To measure employees’ satisfaction by December 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General targets</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>SAU’s target in 2004</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of conferences/seminars/symposia held at our university</td>
<td>To be counted</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>It should be at least four</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of international publication incentives</td>
<td>To be counted</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>It should be at least 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit targets</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>SAU’s target in 2004</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of articles published in international refereed journals</td>
<td>To be counted</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>At least one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction by the administrative personnel</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>One year</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>This rate should be at least 85% (the average of the units was taken as the value of the Rectorate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The legal regulation of the process of strategic planning at the national level was completed upon the entry into force of “the Public Financial Management and Control Law” No. 5018 dated 10.12.2003 and Law No. 5436, dated 24.12.2005, containing the amendments to the text of this law. It was completed with “the Regulation on the Working Procedures and Principles of Strategy Development Units” that was published in the Official Gazette dated February 18, 2006 and with “the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles regarding the Strategic Planning in Public Administrations” that was published in the Official Gazette dated May 26, 2006 as the secondary legislation and “A Strategic Plan Preparation Guide” was published by the SPO in order to guide the preparation of strategic plans in accordance with the provisions of these regulations. The present strategic plan of SAU has been updated according to the guide by the SPO.

To assess the quality development activities of institutions of higher education, quality agencies are composed and it is ensured that the quality levels of institutions of higher education are determined by using external assessors. The Regulation on the Academic Assessment and Quality Development in
Institutions of Higher Education, prepared to launch the activities envisaged to improve the quality levels of the academic and administrative services of institutions of higher education in Turkey by the Council of Higher Education and to develop alliances among countries with regard to quality assurance within the scope of the Bologna Process, was published in the Official Gazette No. 25942 dated 20.09.2005 and came into force (YODEK’s Guide V1.0, 2006). The YODEK (the Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Development in Higher Education) defined the processes to guide the conducting of academic assessment and quality development activities in institutions of higher education in the light of the regulation concerned. With this guide, the quality and strategic plan activities of universities were standardized. SAU reviewed the effectiveness of its approach to strategic planning in 2007 and adapted its strategic plan to YODEK’s guide. Strategic Plan 2009-2013 of SAU, which is still valid, contains 10 main strategies and 11 strategies of these strategies and targets, sub-targets and activity plans were defined to attain these strategies. Table 2 shows the examples of targets and sub-targets of the first strategy in Strategic Plan 2009-2013 of SAU.

Table 2: Strategy-target-sub-target examples in Strategic Plan 2009-2013 of SAU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy: S1.1 To be adequate and efficient with the qualifications of its students and employees, its relationships with its stakeholders, its opportunities and its resources.</th>
<th>Sub-target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T.1.1.1. To enhance the quality of students to be placed in the associate programs (by passing either with or without an exam)</td>
<td>T.1.1.1.1. To increase the cumulative grade point average, which is taken as the basis to place students in the associate programs, by 4.1 points by 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.1.1.2. To enhance the quality of students to be placed in the undergraduate programs</td>
<td>T.1.1.2.1. To increase the point averages, which are taken as the basis to place students in the undergraduate programs of our University, by 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T.1.1.2.2. To increase the rate of students included in the first 10% range in the undergraduate programs of our University by 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T.1.1.2.3 To increase the percentage point range, which is taken as the basis to place students in the Undergraduate programs of our University, by 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.1.1.3. To enhance the quality of students admitted to the graduate programs</td>
<td>T.1.1.3.1. To increase the point averages, which are taken as the basis at the entry into the graduate programs of our University that admit students depending on Quantitative/Verbal/Equally Weighted Points of our University, by 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By making an alliance with KalDer in 2006, it was decided to join the National Quality Movement. In the same year, SAU underwent external assessment within the framework of the EFQM (the European Foundation of Quality Management) Excellence Model and was awarded the Award of Competency in Excellence at a 3-star (*** Level). Between 2006 and 2008, training was received with regard to leadership, process management, institutional culture, EFQM Excellence Model (EFQM, 2012) and guidance support. In 2008, SAU demanded external assessment from KalDer for a second time and as a result of the assessment in all units, it was upgraded to the Competency in Excellence at a 4-star (****) Level.

After the assessment in May 2010 by KOYK (the Executive Committee of Kalder Quality Award), SAU became the first university to be deemed worthy of “the National Quality Award” in the Public Category both in Europe and Turkey.

4. Conclusion

The important developments experienced in informatics and communication technologies also affected economic and social life and reassessment and reconstruction activities were launched in many fields. The rapidly experienced environmental changes also brought about the concept of information economy and the developments based on information economy and information society increased the demands for higher education. The fact that the rate of increase in demands for institutions of higher education and the rate of increase in the shares allocated to these institutions from public resources were not the same directed the institutions of higher education to search for new resources and to use their existing resources more efficiently.

The increase in expectations from the institutions of higher education in Turkey and the diversification of the management function brought forward the requirement of implementing systematic and strategy-based approaches in education, instruction, research and society-oriented services of universities. Both in line with the environmental, social and economic needs felt and as required by Law No. 5018, the institutions of higher education also had to review their existing systems, update them and reconstruct their systems.

With Law No. 5018 adopted in Turkey in 2006, it became a legal obligation to make a strategic plan in all public institutions. SAU commenced its strategic plan activities with “Total Quality Management” activities in 2003. In SAU that keeps pace with the environmental changes, the existing situation has been evaluated and planning has been made for the future so as to reach the targeted point with the mission and vision established with a participatory understanding. To enhance the quality of education at the university, strategies were determined in line with the mission and the vision. The strategic plan activities launched at SAU that set the unit and individual targets to help attain the strategies determined integrated into the national developments and regulations in the process and it has now reached a systematic structure. SAU carries on its “Journey of Excellence” by reviewing its targets every year and by continually making development and improvement activities.

Acknowledgements

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Reference


McNamara C., 2006, “Basic Description of Strategic Planning (including key terms to know)” MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/str_plan.htm (available on November 2006)


