

University Strategic Planning: A Sharing from the Vice-Chancellor

Wahid Bin Razzaly¹, Chia Swee Yee^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education,
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Parit Raja, Johor, 86400, MALAYSIA

*Corresponding Author: gb220047@student.uthm.edu.my
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30880/ojtp.2024.09.02.020>

Article Info

Received: 01 August 2023
Accepted: 30 September 2024
Available online: 30 September 2024

Keywords

Strategic planning, formulation, implementation, evaluation, leadership

Abstract

University strategic planning is essential for assuring the success of an educational institution. It is crucial to comprehend the entirety of the strategic planning process and its challenges. This study explores the vice-chancellor's role in the strategic planning process to ensure the university accomplishes its mandate in establishing the institution. A case study was conducted at the University of Technology Sarawak as a qualitative approach. Interviews with the vice-chancellor and documentary analysis are used to gather the data. The findings demonstrated the impacts of strategic foresight, leadership excellence, task performance, staff engagement, stakeholder management and strategic revisiting in the strategic planning process to enable the institution to face internal and external challenges. Accordingly, the implication of this study relates to the critical roles of the vice-chancellor's leadership. It offers a comprehensive view of the strategic planning process and broader ways to address its challenges.

1. Introduction

Every organisation, regardless of form or size, should have a strategic plan in place. Therefore, strategic planning is the organisation's process of determining its strategy and deciding how to allocate its resources in the right position. According to Kabeyi (2019), strategic planning creates the organisation's vision and sets priorities, strategies, and activities to get there; it demands discipline, the identification of goals, and the allocation of resources. Moreover, strategic planning is a disciplined procedure for identifying long-term goals, actions, and investments for maximising and sustaining future success (Grünig et al., 2022). In short, strategic planning aims to help the organisation's priorities to fulfil its organisation better.

Leading an educational institution differs from managing a corporation (Azizi et al., 2022). Therefore, strategic planning for universities also varies from enterprise due to their unique operations (Biondi & Russo, 2022). In conjunction, university strategic planning aims to guarantee that they succeed in their missions and give their students the finest education possible. It involves strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the efficacy of educational programmes. According to Al Kadri and Widiawati (2020), strategic planning is essential for improving the quality of education. Aiming high and putting all their efforts into making those goals a reality is possible via university strategic planning.

The university's vice-chancellor (VC) is the chief executive and academic officer responsible for the university's overall strategic leadership and management (Peter, 2019). The VC is accountable for ensuring the university meets its academic, financial, and operational objectives and developing and implementing strategies to remain competitive. Additionally, the VC is responsible for developing and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders, such as government, industry, parents and the community. According to Visigah (2019), how well a VC manages the university is crucial to the institution's ability to accomplish its mission. It will also

reflect the capability of the VC as a leader in using diversity and innovation to propel the institution to tremendous success (Azizi et al., 2022).

In summary, the VC's role in strategic planning is crucial for every university to ensure its continued existence and growth. Therefore, this study aims to figure out the role of the VC in all aspects of the strategic planning process, including the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies. In this case, a comprehensive view of the strategic planning process may be obtained. Moreover, the valuable VC's experience shared in resolving all issues that arise throughout the strategic planning process may provide a broader perspective.

2. Literature Review

A strategic plan is a vital tool for any organisation. It helps to align stakeholders, set goals, define the steps needed to achieve those goals, and regularly review and update the plan to ensure it remains relevant. In the research by Grande-Ramírez et al. (2022), strategic planning is an essential process for ensuring the effective operations of an institution, as it requires ongoing attention and adjustment. The strategic planning process represents a way of thinking and comparing strategies to pick the best options that fit the existing capabilities and the intended goals (Abujraiban & Assaf, 2022).

In conjunction, Peter (2019) asserted that the university's strategic plan results from the institution's strategic planning process, in which top management (top-down) began this process with institution-wide participation. Therefore, the vice-chancellor as a top management leader plays a key role in strategic planning. Moreover, there must be a linkage of strategy evaluation between strategy formulation and implementation to ensure the success of strategies; otherwise, the strategies only serve as a paperweight (Kabeyi, 2019). Figure 1 shows the roles of the vice-chancellor in each three primary strategic planning process phases.



Fig. 1 *The Vice-Chancellor's role in strategic planning process*

(adapted from Bolatan et al., 2022; Köseoglu et al., 2020; **Kabeyi, 2019**)

3. Methodology

An in-depth case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006) was conducted in which a single example or unit was examined in greater depth. In conjunction, a purposive sample was used in this study, which means that deliberately selected participants were sampled (Creswell, 2007). Besides, this study is not attempting to make generalisations about the entirety of the population. Therefore, selecting research participants must be appropriate according to the level of convenience researcher (Robinson, 2014).

In this case, the University of Technology Sarawak (UTS) is the only Sarawak State Government's "homegrown" TVET university with the mission of producing highly educated and competent human capital. As UTS's vice-chancellor (VC), Professor Datuk Dr Khairuddin Ab. Hamid had extensive expertise in strategic planning. He served as vice chancellor at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) from 2008 until 2013 and University Malaysia of Computer Science and Engineering (UniMy) in Putrajaya from 2014 until 2018. Therefore, face-to-face interviews with the VC of UTS were undertaken to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of the VC in the strategic planning process.

Initially, the researcher developed a set of semi-structured interview protocols based on this study's literature. Interview questions are divided into three parts: strategic formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The interview was conducted on January 10, 2023, and was done in English and Malay, based on the interviewee's

preferred language that was most comfortable speaking. As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher used thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report the data themes. The researcher began by transcribing the audio recording into a table of data. Next, generating initial codes for the detailed data leads to identifying the themes. In producing the report, the researcher summarises the data analysis with evidence of the themes and manually analyses documents to better comprehend the topic.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings indicate that the vice-chancellor (VC) of the University of Technology Sarawak (UTS) must comprehend why the state of Sarawak established the university and its mandate of the university when engaging in the strategic planning process. According to the VC, the State of Sarawak has established the UTS to lead the way in developing and producing technical human resources for the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

UTS is dedicated to providing students with access to a high-quality university education at a cost they can afford, with the goal of developing innovative and entrepreneurial leaders through a curriculum that emphasises the integration of a broad science and technology education with the practical benefits of an applied approach to SCORE-related research and professional development. Therefore, the VC must have a firm grasp on the objective of strategic planning to assist UTS in establishing priorities to better meet its vision and mission. It must align with the university's direction and maintain the state of Sarawak's goal in establishing the university.

In the research by Jalal and Murray (2019), an institution's mission and vision are always considered the starting point for strategic planning. Most tertiary institutions are aware of the need to clearly articulate their vision and mission, their development goals, and the steps they intend to take to reach those objectives. The following are UTS's vision, mission, and core values:

Vision of UTS

“To be a global technical university founded on science and technology.”

Mission of UTS

“To provide world-class educational programs and learning environment to nurture creative and entrepreneurial leaders through a broad yet specialised education in science and technology.”

Values of UTS

“Commitment, Integrity, Caring, Enterprising, Green”

4.1 Analyze of the Effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum by Its Context

The VC of UTS emphasised that UTS is unlike other universities. UTS must prioritise the state of Sarawak's needs in developing a strategic plan. In conjunction, the VC must study the university's strengths, capacities, and available resources, which include its weaknesses. The worldwide trends must also be considered so that the institution is not isolated. According to Thongsookularn (2019), conducting a SWOT analysis of the internal and external environment is a strategic formulation process. Data collection through SWOT analysis could describe each strength, weakness, opportunity, and challenge in the institution (Al Kadri & Widiawati, 2020).

When an institution engages in strategic planning, it gains foresight into the future by looking forward (Hussein et al., 2021). The VC look forward to UTS's future through open-minded interactions with state government, industry, and community. He remarked that the UTS needs to support the vision of Sarawak's state to become a developed state in 2030. At the moment, the state's requirement that marine engineering and law courses be offered is something he must execute. The state government offers a new marine campus in Mukah, which is almost finished build-up. The campus will assign to UTS management as a branch. Besides, UTS also requests to offer a Bachelor of Law because none of the institutions in Sarawak offers this course, including private universities. The VC also emphasises that specific laws are unique in Sarawak, which are different from West Malaysia, for example, native law, land law, and immigrated law.

The VC mentioned that UTS must prepare an upcoming strategic plan for 2023 to 2030. In producing a strategic plan, he must consider an overall perspective. Foresight is an input towards the strategic planning process, influencing the thinking that happens before strategic decisions and ultimately enhancing the framework wherein the strategy is developed, planned for, and executed (Davis, 2021). In summary, strategic foresight helps leaders comprehend, anticipate, and prepare for a change in an uncertain future.

Therefore, the VC stated he must consider what UTS must accomplish within the next few years in all areas, such as achieving five stars in SETARA, three stars in MYRA, ranking in the top 1000 for international recognition, the number of students' enrolment, the number of academic programmes, and the number of international students. Posting all of these measuring indicators to direct UTS is a must. As a part of VC's responsibilities must think about the “big item” before delegating staff groups to study the details. He stated that he prefers to keep

things straightforward, focusing on what requirements UTS is missing to fulfil the goal and proceed. In the research by Mjaku (2020), the most crucial function of a top management is decision-making since it is through leaders' actions that the vision is realised. Thus, an educational institution's VC must determine what to do, how to accomplish it, and who will do it.

4.2 Strategic Implementation

A well-planned strategy will only succeed if implemented (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Strategy implementation requires the expertise, dedication, and cooperation of the staff. Therefore, the VC of UTS stated that influencing staff to embrace the strategic plan effectively is a challenge for the management of every organisation. As a leader, he must "walk the talk" to serve as a role model for his staff, who always believe what they see. According to Mjaku (2020), leaders must have the ability to influence staff and their actions. Leadership excellence is essential to every organisation's success.

The VC stated that academics cannot choose between teaching and research as their sole responsibility. Academics must recognise their respective roles in ensuring university success. For non-academic staff members, they must realise their roles and behaviour to boost university's reputation. Even the university's chauffeur plays a crucial role in picking up international visitors at the airport. The guests attribute their first impression to the driver's courtesy and the vehicle's cleanliness. Therefore, the responsibilities of each staff member, from the lowest to the highest, are crucial. According to Mengistu (2022), the performance of the non-academic staff significantly impacts the quality of education as a whole.

Every year, the VC of UTS will deliver a new year's speech to all the staff to inform them of the university's achievements, challenges, and what they can do. Communication of strategic goals from the top down enhances organisational comprehension of the strategy, which influences the strategy implementation (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). In addition, the VC will remind them about the vision and mission of the university staff to understand the purpose of the university's establishment. According to Mjaku (2020), the role of the leader is to ensure that everyone in the organisation understands the same vision and must be aware of the goals for the future.

Along with the strategy implementation process, the VC said that every organisation must have a tiny group that "protests in silence." According to his expertise, there is no need to waste time on this specific minority; instead, concentrate on the majority who can provide collaboration. Leaders must empower staff to improve continually (Bolatan et al., 2022). In the long-term, as everyone moves forward and this group of staff will realise they have been left behind, a portion of them will leave. Therefore, the VC asserted that academics must intellectually solve the problem and protect the university's reputation. According to Eide et al. (2020), intellectual leadership will mediate the interaction between employee motivation and the need to provide unique and more significant solutions.

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge faced by the Vice Chancellor of UTS is to establish a healthy culture of work at the university, one in which individuals can collaborate, tolerate, and respect one another. The VC always stresses the importance of his staff members not picking up on problems or conflicts with other staff. Everyone has their unique areas of need for advice and support. On the other hand, if "drastic cases" occur, the VC has a responsibility as a leader to take an action on the situation. If not, it will affect the other colleagues and show the weakness of VC. Based on Financial Reporting Council Creating Positive Culture Report (2021), an organisation's leaders are responsible for ensuring that their organisation's culture aligns with its strategies, values, and goals. The CEO's involvement in shaping and instilling the organisation's culture is crucial.

A leader must ensure that all staff carry out their responsibilities in the strategic implementation. According to the VC of UTS, he will cooperate with the human resources department to monitor and revise the strength and interest of the staff when they cannot perform. Then, he will discuss with the staff individually and relocate to a different department for two to three years, not as a punishment but to develop or explore their skills in other ways. In the research findings by Köseoglu et al. (2020), most respondents concur that communication and resource allocation is essential to the strategic implementation. Besides, staff engagement, communication, and timing are three crucial aspects of the implementation process.

According to the UTS's VC, Sarawak state's government is a key stakeholder. Therefore, he must follow their directive. Next, the parents of the students are the next group that deserves attention. If the food being sold in the canteen is either too expensive or tastes terrible, even some professors' insistence on holding classes on weekends; the parents will report it to the VC or vent their frustrations on social media. Thus, a VC must respond to the feedback and offer constructive suggestions for improving the situation. Moreover, the VC need to maintain positive connections with other stakeholders, such as the industry advisory panel also crucial to the success of a strategic plan's implementation. Participation of stakeholders in the planning process to strengthen future commitment to plan execution (Fernandes et al., 2021).

4.3 Strategic Evaluation

Strategic evaluation is the process of analysing the results of a strategic plan or effort to see if it was effective in reaching its intended goals. According to the VC, normally strategic evaluation is conducted by “half way through”. He needs to revisit the strategic plan; modify or change to others programme based on the needs at that moment. Since the VC warned that the strategic plan is always dynamic, achieving even 80% of its stated goals is considered a success. Many internal and external changes occurred within the strategic plan's time frame, like shifts in a leader, government policy, finances, and human resources.

The strategic plan will likely undergo significant revisions when a new president takes over. The VC pledged that this is a common source of waste in many organisations since new leaders are constantly bringing in new strategies. When taking over as the VC of UTS, he said he must respect and appreciate the hard work of formal VC; he revises the existing strategic plan by reviewing the staff's strengths and discusses with them. Scholin et al. (2022) reinforce that leaders must hear from their staff with whom they work closely before adopting new strategies.

In the sharing session, the VC of UTS highlighted an example of strategic evaluation: timber engineering was the requirement of the Sarawak state government before this. However, there is no increasing number of students on the course and no necessity from the industry. Therefore, the VC needs to review the strategic plan and take corrective action to stop the course. According to Hieu and Nwachukwu (2019), an organisation should use a rigorous strategic review process to identify and improve failed strategic efforts. Corrective action is needed if actual performance exceeds tolerance (Athuraliya, 2022).

5. Conclusion

The strategic planning process is typically done in cycles and should be repeated, with revisiting made as needed. In general, the strategic planning process starts with formulating strategies which align with the institution's vision and mission. Next, action plans are designed to implement and evaluated when needed. Through experience sharing by the vice-chancellor, the findings showed a leader needs to set a clear direction and inspire others to follow; communicate effectively to motivate and engage staff; build trust and relationships with stakeholders; demonstrate strong decision-making and problem-solving skills; manage conflict, identifying and addressing issues, developing and implementing plans, monitoring progress and revising plans when necessary. Leaders have a crucial role in attaining organisational goals by creating a culture that influences employees' attitudes, motivation, and behaviour (Fernandes et al., 2021). In conclusion, leadership in strategic planning is a critical component of any successful organisation.

Acknowledgement

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of UTS's vice-chancellor, Professor Datuk Dr Khairuddin Ab. Hamid was involved in sharing his experiences presented in this article.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

References

- Abujraiban, A., & Assaf, G. J. (2022). Effect of strategic planning of human resources in management performance. *Civil Engineering Journal*, 8(8), 1725–1738. <https://doi.org/10.28991/CEJ-2022-08-08-014>
- Al Kadri, H., & Widiawati, W. (2020). Strategic planning in developing the quality of educators and education personnel. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education [IRJE]*, 324–346. <https://doi.org/10.22437/irje.v4i2.9410>
- Athuraliya, A. (2022, November 4). The complete guide to strategy evaluation. *Creately Blog*. <https://creately.com/blog/business/strategy-evaluation-process/>
- Azizi, I. N., Roselina, A. S., Yukthamarani, P. P., & Azlee, W. A. W. (2022). The importance and evaluation of resilience leadership capability in managing university: An understanding. *Innovation of Businesses, and Digitalization During Covid-19 Pandemic*, 961–966. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08090-6_61
- Biondi, L., & Russo, S. (2022). Integrating strategic planning and performance management in universities: A multiple case-study analysis. *Journal of Management and Governance*, 26(2), 417–448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-022-09628-7>
- Bolatan, G. I. S., Golgeci, I., Arslan, A., Tatoglu, E., Zaim, S., & Gozlu, S. (2022). Unlocking the relationships between strategic planning, leadership and technology transfer competence: The mediating role of strategic

- quality management. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 26(11), 89–113.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-12-2020-0897>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Davis, C. (2021, December 16). How foresight enhances strategic planning in times of uncertainty. CIO.
<https://www.cio.com/article/189451/how-foresight-enhances-strategic-planning-in-times-of-uncertainty.html>
- Eide, A. E., Saether, E. A., & Aspelund, A. (2020). An investigation of leaders' motivation, intellectual leadership, and sustainability strategy in relation to Norwegian manufacturers' performance. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 254, 120053. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.120053>
- Fernandes, M. E., Lopes, A. S., & Sargento, A. L. (2021). Improving stakeholder engagement in local strategic planning – Experience sharing based on Portuguese examples. *Policy Studies*, 42(4), 381–396.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2019.1634186>
- Financial Reporting Council. (2021). *Creating Positive Culture: Opportunities and Challenges*. The Financial Reporting Council Limited. Retrieved January 24, 2023, from
https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/9fc6c466-dbd2-4326-b864-c2a1fc8dc8b6/FRC-Creating-Positive-Culture-Report_December-2021.pdf
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219–245.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>
- Grande-Ramírez, J. R., Roldán-Reyes, E., Aguilar-Lasserre, A. A., & Juárez-Martínez, U. (2022). Integration of sentiment analysis of social media in the strategic planning process to generate the balanced scorecard. *Applied Sciences*, 12(23), 12307. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app122312307>
- Grünig, R., Kühn, R., & Morschett, D. (2022). *The strategy planning process: Strategic analyses, objectives, options and projects*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93918-2>
- Hieu, V. M., & Nwachukwu, C. (2019). Strategy evaluation process and strategic performance Nexus. *Business Management*, 43–55. <http://dlib.uni-svistov.bg/bitstream/10610/4052/1/62ef8e2687ff4bac741b1827eba53151.pdf>
- Hussein, A. M., Ahmed, M. M., & Mahmoud Khu, M. Y. (2021). The impact of strategic planning in the university's competitiveness according to NIAS. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 10(5), 83.
<https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2021-0125>
- Jalal, A., & Murray, A. (2019). Strategic planning for higher education: A novel model for strategic planning process for higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Service Science and Management*, 2(2), 1–10. Retrieved from <https://joherd.com/journals/index.php/JoHESM/article/view/31>
- Kabeyi, M. J. B. (2019). Organizational strategic planning, implementation and evaluation with analysis of challenges and benefits for profit and nonprofit organizations. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 5(6), 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2019.v5.i6a.5870>
- Köseoglu, M. A., Altin, M., Chan, E., & Aladag, O. F. (2020). What are the key success factors for strategy formulation and implementation? Perspectives of managers in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 89, 102574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102574>
- Mengistu, Z. (2022). The non-academic staffs' performance and its impact on the students' satisfaction in case of private higher institutions - Addis Ababa. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications (IJSRP)*, 12(1), 103–116. <https://doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.12.01.2022.p12116>
- Mjaku, G. (2020). Strategic management and strategic leadership. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications (IJSRP)*, 10(8), 914–918. <https://doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.10.08.2020.p104113>
- Peter, M. (2019). *The higher education manager's handbook: Effective leadership and management in universities and colleges*. Routledge.
https://books.google.com.my/books/about/The_Higher_Education_Manager_s_Handbook.html?id=zj5qDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>
- Schölin, C., Järplind, F., & Norrman, K. (2022). The role of strategic leadership in organizational adaptation during Covid-19 pandemic: A single case study of Åhléns AB. Retrieved January 25, 2023, from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1664398/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Tawse, A., & Tabesh, P. (2021). Strategy implementation: A review and an introductory framework. *European Management Journal*, 39(1), 22–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2020.09.005>
- Thongsookularn, S. (2019). Strategic formulation meaning, definition and explanation. *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Studies*, 19(3), 418–431. <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hasss/article/view/111916/153607>
- Visigah, D. L. (2019). Academic planning committees' operations and managerial effectiveness of vice-chancellor in selected faculties in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. *International Journal of Innovative*

Development and Policy Studies, 7(3), 73–83.