

AN EXPLORATION OF FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN AND ATTITUDES TOWARD STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THEIR INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes and perspectives of members of faculty towards strategic planning activities of their institutions. The study was conducted across four tertiary institutions and had a targeted sample of one hundred lecturers. A total of fifty-three (53) lecturers responded. The instrument used was a self-designed questionnaire consisting of thirty-five items, twenty-six (26) of which were on a Likert scale and the other nine focused on demographics. The study found that 75% of faculty members either agreed or strongly agreed that they are involved in strategic planning activities, while 66% agree or strongly agree that the process is meaningful. The study found a correlation of .563 between the variables 'involvement' and 'meaningful'. Two factors, namely 'use of insights from previous planning activities' and 'holding faculty members accountable for deliverables' (in relation to the strategic plan) accounted for 67.1% (45.8% and 21.3% respectively) of the variation in the data, while a third factor which contributed significantly to the variation in the data relating to the meaningfulness of the process accounted for 10.1% of the variation in the data. The findings of the study suggest that faculty members can be persuaded to participate in strategic planning activities provided they are satisfied that the process is structured and purposeful and is not merely done out of formality. The findings further suggest that among the ways by which the leadership of the institution can signal to faculty that the strategic planning process is to be taken seriously are by the involvement of the leadership in the planning process and the holding of faculty members accountable for deliverables. The study has implications for how strategic planning activities are undertaken and suggest that the credibility of strategic planning activities and the plans they generate, rests largely on what they in fact accomplish.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary institutions are characterized by a certain level of looseness in their operations arising in large part from the culture of academic freedom for which higher education is known (Messah & Mucai, 2011). Vroom (1984) goes even further by suggesting that higher educational institutions are also characterized by vagueness and a tendency toward anarchy.

The level of academic freedom is sometimes expressed in indifference or lack of interest shown by faculty towards non-academic activities, including leadership of committees and engagement in strategic planning activities of the institution. Despite the ethos of academic freedom, the involvement of faculty in the strategic planning process is critical given the crescendo of criticism against public tertiary institutions of rising costs and declining quality as claimed by Immerwahr (2004) and Symonds (2003).

This study seeks to examine the attitudes and perspectives of faculty members towards the overall strategic planning process and implementation of the strategic plans of their institutions. The study also focuses on faculty members' perceptions of the extent of their involvement in the exercise, and their assessments of what makes the planning process and the plans they generate, credible and valuable.

The thrust of some educational institutions to engage in strategic planning is taking place in a context of a tendency towards anarchy, wherein faculty members are often indifferent towards the process. Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009) contended that an academic revolution has taken place in higher education in the past half century. This revolution, they suggest, is marked by transformations unprecedented in scope and diversity, triggered by factors such as globalization. Globalization, while serving as a catalyst for innovation, has also created increased inequity, global compression, and thus more intense competition. These factors have, in turn, resulted in mass demand, growth in service industries and the knowledge economy and, as a consequence, greater pressure for survival on many tertiary institutions, both public and private.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Bradford (2001) suggested that aligning everyone in the organization with the strategic direction of the organization is one of the most important things the leadership of an organization can do beyond formulating and implementing great strategies. Li, Guohui and Eppler (2008) emphasize the need for engaging employees at all levels in the organization in the strategic planning and implementation process, noting that one of the major reasons strategic plans fail is due to lack of sufficient engagement. This view is supported by Stanleigh (n.d.) who lists five factors that are critical to the success of strategic plans. Heading that list is 'engagement'. The other four factors are communication, innovation, project management, and culture. These five factors are in part corroborated by Arasa and K'Obonyo (2012) who in using correlation analysis found that there was a strong relationship between strategic planning and the performance of an organization. The lesson here is that a properly managed strategic planning process which is engaging and supported by a culture of accountability results in improved organizational performance.

Extracting the benefits from a strategic planning exercise is not a simple and straightforward process. Many organizations which invest heavily in strategic planning fail to realize the desired outcomes as Kaplan and Beinhocker (2003) observed. Mintzberg (1994) ridicules the strategic planning process arguing that real strategy is not made in board rooms and as such is not a formal process, and appears to imply that this is one of the possible reasons many organizations fail to extract the benefits from the exercise.

The foregoing views are shared by Martin (2014) who contends that one of the errors organizations make is that of seeking to make strategic planning an exercise that seeks to place the organization in some kind of comfort zone rather than positioning the organization's chances of success in an unpredictable and complex environment. Martin (2014) even suggests that placing 'strategy' and 'planning' side by side is contradictory. Similar views have been expressed by a number of contributors, including Bassett (2012) who describes the notion of 'strategic planning' as an oxymoron.

Jamaica's tertiary institutions have adopted the practice of focused engagement in strategic planning, and perhaps as a result of an incipient or defined consciousness of the complexity of the activity, there has been insufficient engagement of faculty in the strategic planning and implementation process. As a result of this limited engagement the sustainability and success of the plans developed by these institutions are threatened. Given the dependence of tertiary institutions in Jamaica on government grants (which are mainly spent for salaries) and the dependence of private institutions on tuition payments, there are not enough resources available for development. Thus strategic plans are often not funded and bright ideas remain ideas for periods that are longer than is desirable, resulting in loss of enthusiasm for, and interest in, the strategic planning process. In addition to the problem of insufficient engagement, the changing landscape of tertiary education has created conditions that necessitate that even Government-supported institutions gain and maintain market share, in order to remain economically viable.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study seeks to understand the attitudes and perspectives of faculty members towards the strategic planning and implementation process in their institutions as well as their attitudes to the plans and the planning process. The purposes of this undertaking are:

- (a) To find out the extent of involvement of faculty in the strategic planning and implementation processes of their institutions
- (b) To understand what motivates faculty members to participate in the strategic planning and implementation process
- (c) To explore the perspectives and attitudes of faculty towards strategic planning activities in their institutions
- (d) To explore what insights tertiary institutions (and other organizations) may glean from the perspectives and attitudes of faculty members towards strategic planning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research will seek to answer the following questions:

- (1) To what extent are faculty members involved in the strategic planning and implementation activities of their institutions?
- (2) How meaningful do faculty members find the strategic planning and implementation process?
- (3) What are the perspectives and attitudes of faculty towards the strategic planning activities of their institutions?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted across four (4) tertiary institutions - one privately-owned university, one publicly-owned university, and two colleges that are publicly owned. Participants were selected at random. A determination was made that about one hundred lecturers drawn from at least four institutions would provide a fairly good indication of the mindset of the general population.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The assessment made by faculty members of the tertiary institutions concerning the extent of their involvement in the strategic planning activities of their institutions, as well as the level of meaning they derive from their engagement, help to shape their perspectives on strategic planning as an activity of their institutions. These assessments of the level of involvement in strategic planning activities, the depth of meaning derived, and the attitudes and perspectives they spawn, as related by faculty, can provide some important clues and reminders about the nature, purpose and impact of strategic planning and its use in tertiary educational institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Drucker (1954), perhaps the most well-known authority on strategic planning in the 20th century, defines strategic planning as a process of thinking through the issues facing the organization in order to optimize the benefits that can accrue to the organization. Drucker (2002) revisits the foundations of his basic arguments laid out over half a century ago and reiterates the futuristic orientation of strategic planning arguing that in order for organizations to be able to exploit the changes of the future and turn them into opportunities for the enterprise, executives need to develop a deep understanding of the realities facing the organization.

Ansoff (1970) conceptualizes strategic planning as the process of seeking a better match between a firm's products or technology and its increasingly turbulent markets. Ansoff's (1970) indelible mark on the practice of strategic planning is seen in the continued use of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis for which he is a major architect.

Ansoff's (1970) basic view that strategic planning is about matching resources with requirements of the market, is supported by Cook (1995) and Wendy (1997). Cook (1995) locates strategic planning on a path that moves from a defined mission to objectives, strategies, and then action plans. The crafting of these elements is supported by internal and external analyses, which include an assessment of the competition in ways akin to a SWOT analysis. Wendy (1997) explains that strategic planning is the process of developing and maintaining consistency between the organization's objectives and resources and its changing opportunities. Bryson (2011) argues that strategic planning must be linked to leadership, stakeholder involvement, the budget process, system redesign, and performance management.

Nickols (2016) catalogues perspectives and definitions of strategy and strategic planning as advanced by various authorities from 1962 to 1996, starting with Chandler's *Strategy and Structure*. Nickols (2016) shows that while there are some differences in what each authority advances as the meaning of these concepts, there are key areas of consensus. One area of consensus is that *strategy* and *strategic planning* are not one and the same but the latter takes elements of the former into

account. The other key area of consensus is that strategic planning involves determining an organizational mission, setting goals, allocating resources to support goal attainment, and monitoring results.

Thompson and Strickland (1996) suggest that strategic planning is a process of reviewing the nature and purpose of an organization's existence, taking account of the external environment in order to determine what kind of business the organization should be in and establishing clear objectives to be pursued in support of that determination of the organization's *raison d'être*.

Supporting the general thrust of the positions advanced above, Arasa and K'Obonyo (2012) conclude that strategic planning, in its general and basic understanding, is a process of selecting organizational goals and strategies, determining the necessary programs to achieve specific objectives en route to the goals that the organization has set itself, and establishing the methods necessary to ensure their attainment.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Li, Guohui, and Eppler (2008) found nine different factors that affect strategy implementation. They divided these nine factors into three categories soft, hard, and mixed factors. *Soft factors* are people-oriented variables which include the executors of the strategy, the communication activities as well as consensus about and commitment to the strategy. *Hard factors*, on the other hand, they identify as *institutional* variables which include the organizational structure and the administrative systems which would inform the way in which the strategy was developed and articulated. *Mixed factors* are embedded in the strategy formulation process which contains hard and soft factors. One of the critical variables in the strategy formulation process, which produce the mixed factors, is the relationships among different units/departments. The issue of soft, hard, and mixed factors provides insights into the findings of Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta (2007) who found that engaging faculty in the affairs of the institution, even in core functions such as research – particularly in higher educational institutions that do not have a strong research culture – requires effort and incentives.

The issue of faculty involvement in strategic planning as illustrated by soft, hard and mixed factors of Li, Guohui, and Eppler (2008) intersects with the concept and practice of distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). According to Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) a distributed leadership perspective recognizes that there are multiple leaders in the organization. These leaders must all be brought into the decision making process and in doing so the organization must take account of their varied interests and capacities of the leaders as well as the various ways in which to engage them. (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane & Camburn 2006).

The importance of emotions and people engagement, and the applicability of soft, hard, and mixed factors, are also at play in the work of Jacob and Hawkins (2009) who in a study of ten Chinese universities, highlight the critical importance of strategic planning among higher education institutions (HEIs). China has the world's largest education system and gives strategic planning activities an exceedingly high priority. Jacob and Hawkins (2009) point out that Chinese HEIs are surrounded by, and interact with, a local and global environment, which is virtually everything outside of the boundaries of the campus. The key elements of these strategic planning activities, according to Jacob are organizational *strategy*, institutional *culture*, and hard and soft *technology* – *with hard referring to*, all physical characteristics such as buildings, computers, and laboratories and soft technologies to all human resources, institutional knowledge, senses, and everything that exists inside of the individuals.

Positions

Messah and Mucai (2011), in a study examining factors affecting the implementation of strategic plans in government tertiary institutions in Kenya, appear to capture the cynicism some stakeholders in the tertiary community feel about the activity, noting that while institutions were always engaged in planning there was never really anything strategic about the process as the planning has always been the traditional one merely following the government's five year planning cycle. They note further that it is common knowledge that government's five year planning cycles

mostly involved adjusting plans for inflation and political changes especially to accommodate the whims of the ruling regime.

The observations by Messah and Mucai (2011) concerning the routine nature of strategic planning in the universities are shared by Paris (2003) who indicates that strategic planning in American universities grew out of the budget exercises in America in the 1950's. Mintzberg (1994) notes, however, that by the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970's strategic planning at the university level took on the same fervor and importance as it did in large corporations. The consciousness among faculty of American colleges and universities about the need for strategic planning, and their involvement in same, continued to varying degrees throughout the 80's and 90' and into the 00's and beyond, as confirmed by Keller (1983) and Bryson (1988) and Jurinksi (1993) all cited by Paris (2003). It is not to be concluded, however, that all American universities were actively engaged in strategic planning. Indeed some universities, particularly those that continued to do well, never saw the need to engage in strategic thinking and planning until the ferocity of market competition was seen on the horizon.

It is noteworthy that in Kenya, the importance of strategic planning in education is emphasized at the tertiary and secondary levels. Chemwei, Leboo, and Koech (2014) in examining the factors that impede the implementation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Kenya, observe that despite the evidence of the existence of strategic plans in learning institutions in Kenya, the greatest impediment to the successful use of these strategies has been failure by institutions to implement them. With increasing competition from private schools, the need to become adept at plan implementation is an urgent matter, they argue.

Most tertiary (or higher educational institutions) in Jamaica have engaged in the development of strategic plans but what is unknown are the extent of faculty involvement and the attitudes that faculty have towards this exercise. This research seeks to establish both the level of involvement of faculty in the strategic planning exercise and their attitudes to, and value they place on it.

Underlying Theory

The underlying theory that informs this research is that unless there is system-wide faculty involvement in the strategic planning exercise then the plans that emanate from the exercise are likely to be ineffective or even stillborn. The converse of this assertion, therefore, is simply that the likely effectiveness of the strategic planning exercise is dependent heavily on extensive faculty participation. Within the context of academic cultures of freedom as articulated by Messah and Mucai (2011), and a tendency towards anarchy as suggested by Vroom (1984), the key question becomes, 'how do we get faculty involved in the strategic planning process given their vital importance to the exercise and its outcomes?'

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employs an exploratory design. Not much is currently known about the level of faculty participation in, and attitudes to, the strategic planning processes in Jamaican-based tertiary institutions. According to Cuthill (2002) an exploratory design is used to conduct research about a problem when there are few or no earlier studies to refer to or rely upon to predict an outcome.

The literature suggests that faculty participation in strategic planning has increased over the last three to four decades; but the literature is not generally categorical about the level of participation and there is no indication of the attitudes of faculty toward the exercise.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore what is the 'state of play' or 'lay of the land' in relation to the level of involvement of faculty in Jamaican tertiary institutions to the strategic planning processes in their institutions and their attitudes to the process. The insights from this study will be used to inform further interventions designed to investigate probable causes and propose possible solutions to challenges identified.

Sample

The participants were randomly selected using a convenience sampling technique of contacting faculty at tertiary institutions with which the researcher was familiar. Convenience sampling is a specific type of non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in the study. Leedy and Omron (2010) reiterate that no sample size is perfect and Krejcie and Morgan (1970) had long ago suggested that the larger the population the smaller the nominal size of the sample. Krejcie and Morgan suggested that a sample of just fewer than 400 would be representative of a population of 1,000,000 and over. The faculty population of tertiary institutions in Jamaica is less than 10,000, thus using the guidelines above a sample of 40 would be about adequate.

A total of 53 lecturers out of a desired sample of 100 constitute the sample of the study. The age cohorts of the sample as well as the number of years they have been working as lecturers are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Age Cohorts of Members of Sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 20 - 30 years	6	10.9	11.3	11.3
31 - 40 years	14	25.5	26.4	37.7
41 - 50 years	21	38.2	39.6	77.4
51 - 60 years	11	20.0	20.8	98.1
Over 60 years	1	1.8	1.9	100.0
Total	53	96.4	100.0	
Missing System	2	3.6		
Total	55	100.0		

Table 2

Number of Years of Lecturers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Five years or less	16	29.1	30.8	30.8
6 - 10 years	14	25.5	26.9	57.7
11 - 15 years	7	12.7	13.5	71.2
16 - 20 years	11	20.0	21.2	92.3
Over 20 years	4	7.3	7.7	100.0
Total	52	94.5	100.0	
Missing System	3	5.5		
Total	55	100.0		

The sample comprised 60% females and 40% males. Of this total 75% were lecturers and the other 25%, senior lecturers. Forty-three (81%) of the respondents work in public institutions while the other 10 respondents (19%) work in a private institution.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a self-designed instrument (see Appendix). The instrument consists of twenty-six items on a 5-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. The points on the scale did not represent values but simply a numerical representation of the chosen answer.

Grace-Martin (2008) comments on the question of using Likert scales data in parametric statistical procedures that require interval data, such as Linear Regression, ANOVA, and Factor Analysis, and notes that questions of whether this approach is legitimate arise. Grace-Martin (2008) asserts that despite being made up of numbers, a Likert scale item is in fact a set of ordered categories. This view is supported by Jamieson (2004) who maintains that as ordered categories, the intervals between the scale values are not equal, thus any mean, correlation, or other numerical operation applied to them would be invalid. On the other hand Lubke and Muthen (2004) contend that while technically the Likert scale item is ordered, using it in parametric tests is valid in some situations.

Grace-Martin (2008) proposes some solutions that are designed to address the concerns of those who question the appropriateness of using Likert scales in the context being used in a study such as this. These solutions include the use of a minimum of a 5-point scale with the underlying concept being continuous, and ensuring that strong results are produced before making claims. These strong results are measured, among other ways, by using stringent alpha level, like .01 or even .005, instead of .05. All of Grace-Martin’s (2008) proposed standards are met by this instrument as well as the results.

Instrument Reliability and Validity

The instrument used in this study was designed by the author. The instrument was benchmarked against another instrument that was developed, critiqued by a panel, revised, and piloted-tested twice and further revised, and used by the author in another study. In developing the current instrument the standards outlined by Drost (2011) and Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991) and Nunnally (1978) which emphasize internal consistency, coverage, and balance among the items / factors in the instrument were taken into account. The items in the instrument reflect the focus of the conceptual understanding of strategic planning as advanced by Ansoff (1970) and Drucker (2002) Kaplan and Beinhocker (2003) and Bryson (2011) and Thompson and Strickland (1996). The correlations found in a number of the analyses demonstrate the level of internal consistency of the instrument. The instrument was long enough to cover a range of important elements (Nunnally, 1978), but not too long to bore the respondent, (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991).

The issue of the validity of the instrument revolved around *external validity* and *construct validity*. The size and scope of the sample provided the level of representativeness to create external validity and thus to support the generalizability of the findings. The requirements for *construct validity* were satisfied by capturing and describing behaviours in the items that reflected important elements of strategic planning, not merely planning in general. The distinction between strategic planning and planning in general, is critical as was discussed above. Trochim (2006) points to the importance of ensuring that a concept or idea is translated into a functioning and operating reality.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The instrument was administered electronically (using a Google facility) and in hard form to a local contact. Access was gained to the sites through formal request made to the principal or president and the relevant forms were completed as was required by one institution. Those using the electronic method accessed the instrument via a link. Those who used the hard form completed forms and returned them via a local contact (research assistant). All responses remain anonymous. Data were entered into Excel then exported to SPSS where they were analyzed using SPSS V 21.

RESULTS

Research Question # 1 – Level of Involvement in the Strategic Planning Process

The first question that this research seeks to answer is: “To what extent are faculty members involved in the strategic planning and implementation activities of their institutions?” Approximately forty (40) respondents or 75% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they were involved in the strategic planning activities of their institutions.

Research Question # 2 – Meaningfulness of the Strategic Planning Process

The data show that 66% of the sample either agreed or strongly agreed that the Strategic Planning (SP) process was meaningful. A correlation of .563 was found between the variables, ‘*The SP implementation process is well-defined*’ and ‘*The SP process is meaningful*’. This correlation had a 0.01 level of significance and thus gives a strong indication as to why faculty are likely to give or not give attention to the strategic planning process.

A similar picture, obtains with respect to faculty members’ assessment of how their being assigned responsibilities under the plan correlates with the amount of meaning they derive from their engagement with the process. The correlation in this case is .459. The issue of the source of meaningfulness is further confirmed in a correlation of .774 between the variables ‘*the participation of faculty is valued*’ and ‘*contributions made by faculty about priorities are respected*’.

A further insight into what faculty members consider to be meaningful about the strategic planning process was found when the variables ‘*plan promotes collective responsibility*’ and ‘*plan has strengthened the institutions’ market position*’ where a correlation of .692 was found. A similar level of correlation, .689, was found between the variables ‘*plan promotes collective responsibility*’ and ‘*plan inspires confidence in the institution’s future*’.

Research Question # 3 – Perspectives and Attitudes of Faculty towards Strategic Planning

The issues analyzed in this regard were (a) whether they were of the view that the plans took into account the external realities facing the institution and (b) what other considerations should be placed alongside the assessment of external realities. These findings show a correlation of .575. Faculty concerns about the alignment between their institution’s plans and their mission and vision, on the one hand, and their confidence in the future of the institution, on the other, were fairly strong producing a correlation of .658. Faculty members also expect that the head of the institution will show leadership of the strategic planning process as their confidence in the process is hinged thereon as evidenced by a correlation of .566 between the variables ‘*principal / president presides over strategic planning process*’ and ‘*plan inspires confidence in the future*’.

DISCUSSION

The top three factors which account for the variation in the data are: (a) *Previous Planning Insights used in Planning Process*, (b) *Faculty held responsible for Deliverables*, and (c) *The SP Implementation Process is Fulfilling*. These three factors account for 77% in the variation in the data with the first accounting for 45.7%, and the other two for 21% and 10% respectively.

The data uncovered by this study reiterate some key issues about inclusive and distributive leadership (Spillane & Camburn, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004) as much as they do about meaningful strategic planning (Jacob & Hawkins, 2009). The findings also highlight the vital importance of taking account of the historical plans (Drucker 1954) the efforts that were made to deliver under those plans, the results of those efforts, and the level of accountability for delivery (Ansoff, 1970; Bryson, 2011; Wendy, 1997).

Topping the list of the most important issues that faculty members take into account when asked to participate in strategic planning activities is how much the organization has learnt from past efforts. This factor accounts for 45.7% of the variation in the data. The next most important item is accountability which accounts for 21.3% of the variation in the data. Accountability was also found to be an important quality in strategic management in the works of Thompson and Strickland (1996) and Arasa and K’Obonyo (2012) both of whom emphasize the setting of objectives. The location of

the third variable, which accounts for 10% of the variation in the data may be interpreted to mean that when there is due regard paid to the outcomes of past efforts and where there has been appropriate accountability, faculty members are likely to find the process fulfilling.

While tertiary institutions are characterized by a certain level of looseness in their operations, as suggested by Messah and Mucai (2011) resulting in low levels of participation of faculty members in activities such as strategic planning, the underlying reasons for the low levels of participation appear to be less related to the insularity that is typical of academic cultures and more related to the perceived or assessed demonstrated value of these activities and their outputs. The findings of this study suggest that faculty members perceive that among the weaknesses in the strategic planning processes of their institutions are issues such as insufficient use of insights from previous planning efforts and lack of accountability. Thus separate and apart from the issue of involvement in the strategic planning activities of their respective institutions, there is the issue of their perspectives on how well the strategic planning is carried out.

The need for organization-wide involvement in strategic planning exists in the best of times but is even greater when the external business environment in which the organization operates is 'hostile'. The landscape of tertiary education faces a hostile business environment. This hostility, as Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2009) suggest, requires that greater efforts be made to build a coalition of committed staff if the institution is to cope with the unprecedented challenges that have been triggered by factors such as globalization. Building a coalition of committed staff requires, as Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta (2007) suggest, the provision of incentives in order to attract faculty members' interest in the affairs of the institution. Understanding what kinds of incentives will gain the attention and interest of faculty members is vital.

Retaining the Interest of Faculty

At face value, being 'involved' could mean different things to different members of a faculty, so further exploration would be required. This was the focus of the second research question. In order to attract and retain the interest of faculty members in strategic planning efforts, there are at least three compelling incentives that should be considered. The first two may be described as incentives in relation to personal expectation. The first is in relation to the taking into account of their contributions in negotiating and deciding on the priorities of the plan and the second is accountability for deliverables. The third incentive, which I describe as process-related, arises from the institution's reputation in using insights from previous planning activities and thus showing that it is learning from past failings and successes. That this single issue accounts for 45.7% of the variation in the data suggests that a great weight of importance is placed on the matter of what the institution learnt and accomplished in relation to previous plans.

Faculty members saw a strong relationship between the sensitivity (responsiveness) of strategic plans to their external realities and the attention paid to, and insights gained from, previous plans. The fact is that while external realities undergo change, some issues remain relevant from one planning cycle to the next and thus the credibility of a subsequent planning exercise rests in part with how seriously the institutions take the lessons learnt from a previous planning activity, in the context of the previous and prevailing external realities (as well as other variables). The importance of this focus on the issues that face the organization has been demonstrated by (Ansoff, 1970; Bryson, 2011; Drucker, 1954, 2002).

Taking account of the contributions of faculty members in deciding on the priorities of the plan does not mean that every idea and suggestion is included in the plan but that a decision on inclusion or exclusion of every idea is arrived at through discussion, debate, and even negotiation.

The need to gain the attention and commitment of faculty members is an unavoidable responsibility of leaders of higher educational institutions as Bradford (2001) suggests. Capturing the attention of faculty requires, as this study has shown, a well-defined implementation process. The clarity and focus of the implementation process goes to the heart of meaning as shown by the correlation of .563. This capturing of the attention of staff involves the alignment of everyone in the organization with the strategic direction of the organization.

If there is going to be meaningful alignment there is need for a clear sense of the organization's personality and there also needs to be some stability in the organization's personality even as it seeks to remain flexible and adaptable. This stability rests within the organization's mission. Strategic planning is built around a mission and vision and is grounded in a set of core values. It is therefore instructive that respondents to the survey seemed to be of the view that confidence in the organization's future was closely related to how aligned activities are to the organization's mission.

Li, Guohui, and Eppler (2008) in discussing factors that affect strategy implementation identified nine such factors. Among the factors they identify are soft or people-oriented variables which include communication activities. They contend that the implementation of a strategic plan can flounder if issues such as the timeliness and content of communication are not carefully addressed. The issue of holding faculty members accountable for deliverables involves timely follow-up to ascertain whether agreed deliverables are on schedule, or checking-in to find out if problems are being encountered. The tone, timeliness, and focus of the inquiries are critical to the quality of response and the maintenance of motivation. I suggest, therefore, that an important dimension of exercising accountability is the quality of communication and in this regard the findings of this study would resonate with those of Li, Guohui, and Eppler (2008).

CONCLUSIONS

The key lessons from the findings of this research may be summarized by attempting the final research question, which asks: *“What are the insights that senior management in tertiary institutions, and other organizations, can gain from the perspectives and attitudes of faculty members towards strategic planning?”*

The findings of the research have confirmed much of what is already in the scientific literature concerning the principles and processes of effective strategic planning. The following conclusions are being advanced:

- (i) Staff members should be presumed to have an interest in participating in the strategic planning activities of the organization
- (ii) The leadership of the organization needs to ensure that the strategic planning and implementation processes are well defined as these affect the meaningfulness of the undertaking.
- (iii) The contributions of staff members should be taken into account in determining the priorities of the strategic plan.
- (iv) Confidence in the strategic planning process is affected by two things, namely the extent to which insights from previous planning efforts inform current planning activities and the alignment of the plans to the mission of the organization.
- (v) The value and meaningfulness that a strategic plan is perceived to attract dependent on the extent to which team members are held accountable for deliverables under the plan.
- (vi) The head of the organization should assume leadership of the strategic planning process but should ensure that there is a sense of collective ownership of the process. Collective ownership is created when the contributions of staff are taken into account.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing conclusions the following recommendations are offered to leaders of organizations – both tertiary educational institutions and other organizations:

- (i) College and University administrators should pursue active steps to facilitate the involvement of faculty in the strategic planning and implementation processes of their institutions.
- (ii) Guidelines for operational plans should be clearly articulated to accompany the strategic plan with specific offices or individuals held accountable for implementation of the activities contained in the plan.

- (iii) Contributions of staff members should be meticulously documented and debate on these contributions should take place before decisions are taken concerning the items that are included in the final plan.
- (iv) A methodological framework for using the insights and experiences gained from previous planning efforts should be developed and those insights that are used to inform the most recent plan should be articulated and highlighted.
- (v) There should be demonstrable alignment between the objectives of the Strategic Plans and the institution's vision and mission
- (vi) Deliverables should be assigned to team members who should be held strictly accountable for outcomes.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questionnaire

Dear Colleague: I am undertaking a research for the purposes of acquiring a better understanding of the perspectives of faculty members of tertiary institutions in relation to the strategic planning and implementation processes of the organization. I would be most grateful if you could contribute to this endeavour by completing this questionnaire. You will remain anonymous and your views will not be identifiable with the institution with which you work.

Regards,

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Management Consultant and University Lecturer

Please use the key below to answer the questions that follow

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; U = Undecided; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

	SA	A	U	D	SD
(1) Faculty members are involved in the strategic planning activities					
(2) The strategic planning process adopted by the institution makes adequate provision for the involvement of faculty members					
(3) The strategic planning process is carefully and thoughtfully structured					
(4) Participation in the planning process is very meaningful					
(5) The institution expects that faculty should participate in the strategic planning process					
(6) Senior management of the institution values the participation of faculty in the strategic planning process					
(7) Contributions made by faculty about the priorities of the institution are treated with respect					
(8) The senior management of the institution makes it clear that every faculty member has a role to play in the implementation of the strategic plan					
(9) The implementation process for the strategic plan is generally well defined					
(10) Responsibilities for implementation aspects of the strategic plan are assigned to faculty members					
(11) The process of implementing the initiatives of plan is fulfilling					
(12) The strategic plans prepared by the institution reflect an understanding of the internal challenges facing the institution					
(13) The strategic plans prepared by the institution reflect an understanding of the external realities with which the institution must grapple					
(14) The plans are flexible and responsive to the needs of the changes that arise in the course of implementation					
(15) The institution has benefited from the level of attention it has paid to the strategic planning process					
(16) Lessons learnt from previous planning exercises have been used to inform subsequent planning activities					
(17) The strategic planning process is taken seriously by faculty members					
(18) Whenever faculty members fail to show for planning activities efforts are made to engage them					
(19) Faculty members are held responsible for the deliverables assigned to them under the strategic plan					

(20) There is periodic review of the institution's performance under the plan					
(21) The principal / president provides leadership in the planning process					
(22) The plan is aligned to the mission and vision of the organization					
(23) The plan inspires confidence in the future of the organization					
(24) The institution has been able to strengthen its market position as a result of the quality of its strategic planning					
(25) My professional competencies have been expanded as a result of my involvement in the strategic planning process					
(26) The plan promotes collective responsibility					

Please answer the following questions.

(27) Your age group is:

- (a) 20 – 30 []
- (b) 31 – 40 []
- (c) 41 – 50 []
- (d) 51 – 60 []
- (e) 60+ []

(28) You have been a lecturer for:

- (a) 5 years or less []
- (b) 6 – 10 years []
- (c) 11 – 15 years []
- (d) 16 – 20 years []
- (e) Over 20 years []

(29) You have been a lecturer at your current institution for:

- (a) 5 years or less []
- (b) 6 – 10 years []
- (c) 11 – 15 years []
- (d) 16 – 20 years []
- (e) Over 20 years []

(30) Your highest professional qualification is:

- (a) Bachelor's Degree []
- (b) Master's Degree []
- (c) Postgraduate Cert in Education []
- (d) Doctorate []

(31) You are:

- (a) Male []
- (b) Female []

(32) You are employed to this institution:

- (a) Full-time []
- (b) Part-time []

- (33) The institution is:
- (a) Publicly owned []
 - (b) Privately owned []
- (34) Your position is classified as:
- (a) Lower Management []
 - (b) Middle Management []
 - (c) Senior Management []
- (35) You are a:
- (a) Lecturer []
 - (b) Senior Lecturer []
 - (c) Associate Professor []
 - (d) Professor []