PLANNING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: CHAOS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Albert Einstein once remarked that the world was characterized by a proliferation of means and a confusion of goals. This certainly characterizes the state of global higher education today. The age of technology and the information society are sweeping educators towards a future dependent upon knowing how more than knowing what. Throughout the world, college and university administrators are attempting to determine global scope coupled with the impact of technology. To many educators higher education is now a place of innovation and change, while to others it is a morass of change and fear. However, the COVID-19 pandemic created change and fear gripped higher education and forced change that was totally unexpected. What are the lessons to be learned from this forced change?

No man ever planned to fail – What probably happened was, he failed to plan.
– Will Rogers

INTRODUCTION

The modern world is changing quickly in many unanticipated ways. Stability has given way to uncertainty, panic, and chaos in the contemporary world (Bosire, 2017). In the current environment strategic higher education leaders look for ways to manage in an imbalanced world where the focus is on leading for survival, where the current and future are unpredictable, capacity is uncertain and unknown, and learning is an issue of social and economic security (Beerkens, 2018). Such a time calls for unprecedented response to an unseen enemy with the capacity to render higher education useless. To combat such an enemy, planning is an obvious necessity which demands that leaders plan for an undetermined outcome (Marginson, 2020). How did higher education arrive at such a condition (Yan, 2020)?

The outbreak of COVID-19 has forced changes due to an environment of uncertainty, chaos, and fear as the infectious virus spread throughout the world (Bhumenstyk, 2020). The COVID-19 virus has had an unprecedented impact. As the COVID-19 virus spread from other countries and infections increased, China closed higher education institutions to limit its spread; however, COVID-19 continued to move from one country to another causing a worldwide health emergency (Bozhurt & Sharma, 2020; Zizek). Higher education institutions worldwide were forced to close, disrupting a $600 billion world-wide industry (Hechinger & Lorin, 2020).

NEED FOR PLANNING

Higher education institutions have two basic choices in preparing for, managing and mitigating crises. They can try to anticipate and avert them, and/or become resilient (Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2016). It is desirable, of course, to anticipate and avert crises whenever

possible, but anticipation can be effective only in situations where (1) the probability of the worst risks to be faced are known, and (2) knowledge can be used to avoid or mitigate negative outcomes (O'Regan & Ghobadian, 2007).

Although leaders in academe have a crucial role in the response of their institution to crises, in reality, the role of campus leaders in establishing a culture of trust, collaboration, and shared leadership prior to a crisis will more significantly influence the ability of the institution to withstand times of crisis (Gigliotti & Fortunato, 2017). Faced with the uncertainty and growing intensity of the novel coronavirus pandemic, academic leaders in colleges and universities in the United States and around the world made the strategic decision to transition to online teaching (Duari & Sarkar, 2019; Heitz, Laboissiere, Sanghvi, & Sarakatsannis, 2020).

The forced change to remote learning was stressful as neither faculty nor students were prepared for the rapid change to online teaching since many academic institutions lacked the faculty with experience in online teaching (Teresevičiene, Trepule, Dauksiene, Tamoliune, Costa, 2020). The transition to remote online delivery required radical changes in attitude, values, and beliefs for many faculty, students and administrators (Zubascu, 2020). It also required process and procedure enhancements, new strategies, and even new ways of doing business for most institutions (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). The decision by leaders to transition to online education was made swiftly, prompted by the need to comply with government mandates to close (Basilaia, Dgebuadze, Kantaria, & Chokhonelidze, 2020). A rapid response from leadership was essential for effective crisis management, and the transition to online learning sent a clear message to all stakeholders that leadership understood the coronavirus represented a significant problem, they were taking the health threat seriously, and were taking steps to address it (Cowen, 2020).

Most institutions have information in their strategic plan to address crisis (Kotler & Murphy, 1981). However, most of those plans include short-term issues and catastrophes that are weather-related or associated with social unrest, typically local not international. Few institutions had plans for a pandemic that could last for years, not just months. In fact, there are few plans to address a massive world-wide event that encompasses most of higher education throughout the world (Karalis, 2020). Once the Chinese closed their higher education institutions, closing higher education institutions became almost the only model. Were there plans to do this (Shah, 2013)? Probably not. So, what should be done? Plan for the unknown (Mallon, 2019).

WHAT IS PLANNING?

The purpose of planning in higher education is to enhance institutional effectiveness and improve management capability (Taylor & de Lourdes Machado, 2006). The planning process can help an institution cope with an uncertain future (Waller, Lemoine, Mense & Richardson, 2019). Planning's dual purpose is to connect an institution to its environment and to provide unity and direction. Planning requires that an institution become active rather than passive. Planning is a resource and potential supplier of competitive advantage that portends a dramatic shift away from the assumption of a "one size-fits-all" model (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

Planning processes should be adapted to the specific conditions facing the institution (Seymour, 2011). Each institution must assess its own environment and make the best decisions possible (Albrechts & Balducci, 2013). Planning is a rational and systematic process that requires higher education leaders and stakeholders to determine where the institution is headed, why the institutions should go there, and directions for getting there, including an evaluation plan (Akinyele & Fasogbon, 2010).

Planning is critical because higher education institutions function as the sum of independent parts that work together to achieve a common purpose (Batra, Kaushik, & Kalia, 2010). However, the plan must remain flexible as higher education and the world are not stable, are sometimes chaotic, creating the need for revision and adaption of plans to meet evolving issues (Bynander & Nohrstedt, 2020). Plans should not be written in stone because they need to be updated and revised as the need arises (Bruckmann & Carvalho, 2018).

Higher education planning entails both formulation and implementation of strategy. Through planning, higher education institutions determine their major goals and objectives and then develop policies and procedures geared to meet objectives (Jalal & Murray, 2019). Changes in the higher education landscape due to external influences have triggered a realization that institutions need to use planning techniques to shape and re-think strategy in order to survive, and become more flexible, creative, innovative, and inventive (Wanaswa, Awino, & Ofutu, 2017).

Another aspect of planning is the need to identify ends before means. Where to go should guide the means for getting there (Snyder, 2015). If a goal or end is imperative for the institution, decisions must be made about the allocation of resources to get there (Mensah, 2020). Resources include time, money, people, facilities, and technology (Haines, 2016). In contrast, ends are results, consequences, and payoffs that the institution produces. Without a plan the institution will miss defining and justifying *where* it is headed before defining *how* to get there (Albrechts, Balducci, & Hillier, 2016).

Planning provides the structure needed to identify and focus on problems, issues and concerns for the institution (Moran, 2020). Planning helps organize and engage personnel in the pursuit of common goals. Planning increases communication so all parties understand their responsibilities (Mueller, 2015).

Planning should focus on the top priority: students' educational achievement. The greatest responsibility is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, learning experiences, and support so they may be prepared to survive and thrive in a world full of uncertainty, changes, and challenges (Albrahim, 2020). Planning permits the institution to set the stage for change: for the institution and most importantly for students (Carver, 2020).

LEADERSHIP IN A CRISIS

Leadership means the ability to anticipate and envision the future, maintain flexibility, think strategically and initiate changes that will create a competitive advantage for the institution. Efforts to envision multiple futures and develop multiple strategies to meet the needs of those futures are presently taking place around the world (Altbach & Reisberg, 2018).

The need to navigate change and adapt is widespread in higher education, which has grown increasingly unstable, unpredictable, and unbalanced in the current time of rapid and sustained change (Lemoine & Richardson, 2019). The challenge of leading during uncertainty involves the courage to take action when the longer-term way ahead is unclear (Young, 2020). The capacity for higher education leaders to handle complexity, engage people in vision, partner effectively and lead through change is a strategic necessity in unprecedented times (Hayes & Wooten, 2010). Paradoxical leadership examines incongruent demands for control and flexibility to analyze their interplay relative to organizational effectiveness, leadership, culture, and decision making (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Farson, 1996).

Protecting the physical welfare of students, faculty and staff juxtaposed against the need to

continue education for students is the current paradox (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020a). Most university leaders chose the option first used by the Chinese (Wang, Cheng, Yue, & McAleer, 2020): close the university to protect health and move all learning opportunities online even though the move to remote learning was not planned for by the university or the students (Daniel, 2020).

PLANNING FOR A CRISIS

Was there planning for such an event as COVID-19? Not much – because there was such little time to prepare. Most universities had a plan for a catastrophe in place, but probably not one as extensive and encompassing as needed when presented by a world-wide pandemic. Most universities had plans for local disasters, but not something as far-reaching as COVID-19, which impacted the entire United States and the world (Evans, 2020).

Wynn and Guditus (1984) define planning as a "road map;" while Drucker (1968) stated that planning was a means for obtaining a desired future. Simply stated, planning is a process of deciding what to do and how to do it before some action is required (Said, Ahmad, Mustaffa, & Ghani, 2015). Contingency planning implies that there is no one best way to think about and manage the educational institution. That is not to say that any one way is as good as any other: the concept is that different organizations exist in different conditions and face different problems. Therefore, leaders need to think about those conditions and adapt their planning to them (Poister, Edwards, & Pasha, 2013).

All planning begins as a response to a stimulus. Planning begins with an identification of the problem, and almost always includes a proposed solution to the problem. Planning is a component of strategy; it is an active option to cope with the problem and the future (Schraeder, 2002). Planning has the same essence in all kinds of organizations. It aims to define what to accomplish and how to do so, in order to respond to a dynamic environment. Nonetheless, the formulation of a strategy, based on specific frameworks, differs among institutions (Tromp & Ruben, 2010).

Lewis (1983) specifies three separate and distinct types of planning: (1) problem-solving planning, often called crisis management; (2) operational planning, and (3) strategic planning.

Considerations for higher education leaders in using planning are:

1. Planning is not a single concept, procedure, or tool.
2. Planning emphasizes different aspects of a process.
3. Every process application is a hybrid adapted to the unique situation.
4. Planning processes for specific situations must be developed.

In discussing the need of planning because of the difficulty in predicting the future, Lewis (1983) stated three assumptions that can be made about the future:

1. It will differ from the past.
2. It will be difficult to predict.
3. The rate of change will be faster than ever before. (p. 3-4). How true about the development of the Corona virus pandemic.

Kaufman, Herman & Watters (1996) stated that "planning identifies where to go, it justifies why, and shows how we get there" (p.12). Strategic planning can be a major contributing factor for higher education institutions to achieve their goals and increase their productivity and performance. Therefore, planning should be designed to improve the environment of change and achievement in an era of uncertainty (Bennett & Kinney, 2018).

Planning gives direction and a sense of continuity and stability but does not imply rigidity or the inability to change (Albrechts, 2017). Events are always happening to higher education institutions, so the ability to plan for change is an essential skill because change is always present, but growth from change is optional. Growth occurs when individuals and/or groups cope with tough, intractable problems and overcome them (Allison & Kaye, 2015). Change and uncertainty make "optimum planning strategy" impossible because in the case of COVID-19, there was neither the time nor the information required for making plans once the pandemic arrived (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020b). How can higher education leaders make decisions so quickly about issues too complex to be fully understood, given the fact that actions initiated on the basis of inadequate planning may lead to significant regret?

PLANNING STRATEGY

Strategy has historically been considered as a plan of action and is commonly defined as a plan. Mintzberg (1994), defined strategy as an intended plan, realized pattern, perspective, position, and ploy. Thus, the meaning of strategy in the context of higher education institutions is in the form of plans, actions, and tactics to achieve goals. Strategy is the direction a higher education institution takes over the long-term, enabling it to cope with a changing environment (Grünig, & Kühn, 2015).

Strategic planning is the process of understanding the organization's direction while allocating its resources in the most efficient way (Bryson, 2011). However, strategic planning is neither static or predictive; strategic planning is rather a learning and flexible process that enables organizations to adapt in constantly changing environments (Elbanna, Andrews, & Pollanen, 2016). Strategic planning is one key factor of an organization's performance to enhance its adaptation to both external and internal changes.

Economic Considerations Due to the Pandemic

Higher education is increasingly viewed as a major engine of economic development (Elliot, 2020). Higher education operates in a continually fluid and uncertain environment where government is ultimately responsible for the development of higher education. The most obvious trends are those that support the hypothesis that the better the higher education system, the better the economy and the more productive the country (Avdeeva, Kulik, Kosareva, Zhilkina, & Belogurov, 2017). Both the social and economic future of countries depends heavily on the educational attainment of their population and the quality of their higher education institutions (Brandenburg, de Wit, Jones, & Leask, 2019).

The failure of undergraduate students to complete their studies is a cost to a government body which funds higher education institutions and where government appropriations support students through contributions to institutions in the form of tuition fees and/or maintenance. A government's concern is to keep public spending for higher education as low as possible means that the obvious aspect of its economic agenda is best served by minimizing non-completion and delayed completion, as these facets may be construed as inefficiencies in the use of public finances, and hence they become political issues (Kruss, McGrath, Peterson, & Gastrow, 2015). Therefore, one of the major considerations in the pandemic was to find a way to preserve the funding already received for the current semester by using remote online learning (Michie, 2020; Ozili & Arun, 2020).

Technology as a Key Factor

Technology develops the capability and capacity of learning rather than the accumulation of a set of skills. As technology is evolving, the world is changing, and higher education is

progressing toward a global platform of delivery and accommodation. As a result, higher education administrators now focus on technology application and utilization in a changing environment (Rahim, Burrell, & Duncan, 2020).

Higher education institutions are being transformed by technology, particularly in teaching and learning (Englund, Olofsson, & Price, 2017). Higher education institutions are now forced to use more technology to reach a more diverse clientele: older students, returning graduates, and professionals needing updating, to increase student enrollment and increase revenue (Arunasalam, 2016). Technology permits institutions to use technology in the form of primarily online learning, to reach both domestic and foreign students, often using contingent faculty without having to increase physical infrastructure (Dennis, 2018).

How an institution manages its virtual presence has become as important as how it manages its campus and physical presence. The confluence of technology, demographics, and personal requirements makes new instructional delivery systems, new learning activities, and new learning opportunities imperative for higher education survival (Gerybadze, 2020).

However, no one was ready for all instruction to take place online during a pandemic. Thus, the focus for higher education faculty demanded flexibility, learning and development of new knowledge, rather than specific solutions to their lack of preparation for totally online teaching (Chernikova & Varonis, 2016). The pandemic has also renewed attention to the importance of, and how little is known about, learning under stress and urgency in the middle of a crisis.

The problem was that the move to remote learning was abrupt, and not well-planned out. The subsequent implications for teaching, enrollment, faculty, staff, and operations with the rapid move challenged digital infrastructures the ideas of digital literacy; digital pedagogies were mostly unexplored, and rarely prompted any in-depth thought from the course directors or lecturing staff, who received minimal support in the haste to move online (Guthrie, Bond, Kurzweil, & Le, 2020).

Online Learning: The Need for Planning

The massive, disruptive shift to move all existing courses online in a matter of days had to incorporate traditional face-to-face classes, hybrid and partially online classes, as well as labs, practicums, and on campus program courses (Kornbluh, 2020). In general, a complete online course requires an elaborate lesson plan design, teaching materials such as audio and video contents, as well as technology support teams (Moore & Hodges, 2020). However, due to the sudden emergence of the COVID-19 virus, many faculty members faced the challenges of lacking online teaching experience, early preparation, or support from educational technology teams (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020).

Yet, it was also a demonstration of the impact of poorly resourced institutions and socially disadvantaged learners where limited access to technology and the internet impacted on organizational response or students' ability to engage in an online environment (Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, & Wang, 2020). Online education involves more than simply uploading educational content; rather, it is a learning process that provides learners agency, responsibility, flexibility and choice (Anwar, 2020). It is a complex process that requires careful planning, designing and determination of goals to create an effective learning environment (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2020).

To accommodate online learning, institutions needed to go beyond sharing simple tools, tips and tricks and instead focus on the learners' needs, learning contexts, and the availability and accessibility of the tools (Riggs, 2020). What is currently being done should be considered

a temporary solution to an immediate problem. For instance, in the US alone, about 2.4 million undergraduates, which is equivalent to 15% of the total undergraduate students in the US, studied entirely online in the fall of 2019, according to Eduventures. These figures reflected that, even before the outbreak, the use of online education was already low (Kumar, Kumar, Jain Palva, & Verma, 2017). Moreover, few institutions had the capacity to arrange a distance learning program for all their students (Crawford, Butler-Henderson, Rudolph, & Glowatz, 2020).

Other concerns for higher education institutions included multiple lawsuits filed in the US by students attempting to recover funds paid for housing, fees, and missed opportunities for learning. And some students claimed that their learning experiences in online education were not of the same quality as those experienced on campus (Richardson, Sheeks, Waller & Lemoine, 2020).

While moving instruction online enabled the flexibility of teaching and learning anywhere, anytime, the speed with which this transition happened was unprecedented and staggering (Bao, 2020). Although campus support personnel and teams were usually available to help faculty members implement online learning, these teams typically supported a small pool of faculty interested in teaching online, rather than the entire faculty of a higher education institution as well as students who had not previously participated in online learning (Golden, 2020).

Students were also impacted by the move to online (Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong, & Zheng, 2020; Rohman, Marji, Sugandi, & Nurhadi, 2020; Yang, Bin & He, 2020). Additionally, many universities do not have enough infrastructure or resources to facilitate online teaching. Is it possible to teach practicums and labs, music and art courses online (Valachopoulos, 2020)? What will happen to those students whose courses cannot be taught online? The quality of online education is a critical issue that needs proper attention through planning and assessment (Manian, 2020).

Will the pandemic make online instruction go viral (Lau, Yang, & Dasgupta, 2020; Lederman, 2020a)? What will happen with fall enrollments if online is the only choice (Lederman, 2020b)? Is online learning the inevitable future (Naqvi, 2020; Tam & El-Azar, 2020)? If online learning is the future, more planning is necessary to make it efficient and effective for students, faculty and the institution (Coates, Kelly, & Naylor, 2017; Gewin, 2020).

Given the degree of uncertainty about future finance, future markets and future student behavior and online learning, leaders face a difficult challenge.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOW TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

(1) All good future-focused thinking begins with a clear, unvarnished and realistic view of the current state of the institution. What are the 5 to 7 key descriptors of the current state in terms of: (a) financial position; (b) market position; (c) technology position; (d) staffing position; and (e) risks and failures? The core of this work is using data and evidence, not speculation.

(2) Before the COVID-19 lock-down, all higher education institutions had initiatives and plans. Plans need to be regularly reviewed against the known uncertainties and risks of the present and future.

(3) It will also be useful to ascertain the changing thinking of funders, especially governments for public colleges and universities: are they likely to use the precariousness of the current moment to change the systems, structures, funding and roles within the higher education eco-system over which they have leverage? Will they use the power of agency to reshape and reconfigure the system and its work? University decision-makers need to make both skillful and strategic decisions.

(4) There is a need to revisit the institutional mission statement asking the questions: what does it mean right now and for the foreseeable future to be the institution we are? What does the world expect of us?

(5) To what extent do we want to leverage technology-enabled learning as key to our future? One strategic move might focus on investments in the professional development of staff to improve and enhance technology-enabled learning and to deepen their understanding of the pedagogical and andragogical methods of online learning. Additionally, expand digital capabilities as there is a need to build resilience and agility to handle future issues that allow the institution to remain competitive.

(6) Being proactive is a better position to be in than being overly reactive.

(7) With concerns that students may not return to classes for extended periods of time, it will be important to consider technology as a form of risk mitigation, a method to continue to attract and retain students.

(8) Leaders and institutions must develop agility to respond to crisis.

(9) There is a need to review and consider the insight and abilities needed to respond to an evolving crisis.

(10) Planning is key to success. Scenario-planning exercises need to consider decisions that might be needed in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term to ensure differing responses from the university to a crisis that keeps changing.

(11) Flexibility in planning for student needs is critical. More emphasis should be placed on meeting actual student needs rather than prescriptive programs. Again, there is a need to plan with all stakeholders having input.

(12) To be successful in the post-pandemic world, higher education institutions have to plan to be much more flexible and adaptable.

(13) Actively plan for a second pandemic.

(14) Traditional universities have to offer something more than just online learning because institutions doing online learning for years were much better at online learning for students who only wanted an online approach to learning.

WHAT ARE THE AREAS WHERE PLANNING IS NEEDED?

(1) Financial

(2) Faculty use of online (Faculty development)

(3) Technology infrastructure

(4) Maintenance and operations (cleaning and sanitation in dorms and facilities)

(5) Student engagement (what areas are open, how are students to social distance)

(6) Information (students and faculty; what is happening and how)

(7) Stakeholders (continuous information)

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Higher education institutions need to seize this opportunity to strengthen their evidence-based practices, including planning.

(2) The global pandemic has demonstrated that the education system, in general, is unprepared and vulnerable to external threats.

(3) Higher education institutions can expedite their response for continuous learning for faculty. This brings an opportunity for higher education institutions to scale up the training of faculty for online learning instruction which improves student learning.

(4) Although institutions that normally teach face-to-face in classrooms or on campuses will likely return to that mode of instruction, special arrangements put in place during the COVID-19 crisis will leave a lasting and indelible trace.

(5) The pandemic has the potential to be an enabler of more flexible and innovative digital methods of education but could also lead to less quality assurance activities while the focus is on revenue mitigation. Universities undergoing a rapid change period need to be conscious of their ability to continuously monitor the quality of the learning design.

(6) The quality of the learning online needs further study. There was no time to get into details of quality assurance of online teaching as the main goal was to save the education process and continue it in any possible format.

(7) Higher education institutions will need to rethink operations, financing, staffing and their role in rebuilding communities as a result of the pandemic.

(8) While not all experiences of remote teaching were positive, many faculty and students now better understand online learning.

(9) Many higher education institutions need to plan for refocusing of programs based on need and demand.

(10) The pandemic has demonstrated that the internet, including social media, provides powerful communication channels for global higher education institutions.

(11) Technology and globalization are sweeping higher education leaders towards a future dependent upon knowing *how* more than knowing *what*.

(12) The pandemic has once again illustrated the strategic importance of planning for higher education institutions.

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