

The struggle for strategic planning in European higher education: the case of Portugal

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Abstract

A number of significant factors are changing the strategic management landscape in higher education. Market forces are exerting significant impacts on higher education institutions (HEIs) that are fundamentally changing the ways they conduct and manage their affairs. As institutional autonomy grows, so do institutional responsibilities and accountability. Outcomes then determine the future level of autonomy for an institution. These major shifts are forcing HEIs to approach their operations more proactively and from a business perspective in order to be strategically positioned to seize opportunities and confront threats in an increasingly competitive environment. Strategic planning is a tool for assisting an HEI manage itself with foresight and an external focus. Strategic planning is moving more and more into the forefront of higher education discussions in many European countries. As interest in and appreciation of the need for this process grow internationally, higher education planners are confronted with many issues of limited market-driven management experience, as well as trans-national governance and cultural complexities. As higher education leaders in other countries, and especially Europe, turn to the United States for best practices and guidance, planning consultants (many from the business and non-profit sectors) must be equipped with a broader perspective that transcends national boundaries and also grasps the nuances of the higher education culture in Europe. This critical examination of problems in the Portuguese higher education system resulting from a lack of strategic planning and the authors' recommendations for change will offer a better understanding of the European context and how it differs from traditional models. Planners who want to expand their reach and share their expertise with this growing higher education market need to have this perspective. Thus, this paper summarizes a comparative analysis of the extent to which public and private HEIs in Portugal are engaging in a strategic planning process, what aspects of the process are being utilized in each sector and what their perceptions are regarding this involvement.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Higher Education, Portuguese Higher Education, Strategic Management, European Higher Education

Introduction

Education in general, and higher education in particular, is a factor of great importance to the development of a dynamic transnational economy (Johnstone & Teferra, 2004). Higher education is a mainstay in the development and support of economic, social and cultural development for the world (Castells, 2001a; Dill & Sporn, 1995; Newman, 2001). Also, the academy's contribution to scientific and technological advancements is premier and unparalleled in all of recorded history (Gibbons, 1994; Guruz, 2003; Scott, 1995). These advancements have been the cornerstone for the development of specialized human resources (Castells, 2001b; Johnstone & Teferra, 2004). Higher education institutions represent the most meaningful symbol of intellectual, economical, cultural and social life of the community in general. These institutions are the object of great public and private investment and therefore have great expectations thrust upon them (Kerr, 1983). Therefore, the institutions of higher education need to interpret the vital needs of contemporary society (Johnstone & Teferra, 2004), "to live in the market" (Clark, 1995, 165), to be "innovative" (van Vught, 2000, 350) as well as to develop the internal structures to meet their new missions (Detomasi, 1995). Finally higher education institutions "[...] are important symbols of national identity and repositories of the histories, languages, and cultures of the people(s) (Johnstone & Teferra, 2004, 1).

Emphasis is often placed on the changes, environment and the challenges that higher education institutions are facing today (Clark, 1998; File & Goedegebuure, 2003). The current changes and challenges are numerous and complex. Recent challenges for higher education institutions include changing demographics, reduced per capita funding, increased scrutiny from the public, internationalization (Altbach, 2001; Johnstone, 2004; van Vught *et al.*, 2002). Additional challenges include the Bologna Declaration and the European Higher Education area (van der Wende, 2003); a mixed profile in the student population (OECD, 2004); the emergence of new post-secondary institutions (Peterson & Dill, 1997); new competitors (Newman, 2001); the invasion of market forces in higher education (Dill, 2003; Kwiek, 2003); the global knowledge economy (Altbach & Teichler, 2001); a technology-driven society (Guruz, 2003); turbulent environments (Trowler, 2002); E-colleges (Werry, 2001) and increasing external demands (Clark, 1998). As stated by Johnstone (2004, 12):

"Higher education at the beginning of the 21st century has never been in greater demand, both from individual students and their families, for the occupational and social status and greater earnings it is presumed to convey, as well as from governments for the public benefits it is presumed to bring to the social, cultural, political, and economic well-being of countries."

Moreover from the perspective of Europe, Taylor, Amaral and Machado (2004, 12) point out the commonalities that surround higher education systems:

- 1. The inadequate funding of public higher education through the protective cloak of the existing welfare state,*
- 2. The inability to adequately manage emerging massification,*
- 3. The lack of experience and expertise to confront the current and projected demographic decline in students.*

The increasing volatility of the environment has forced institutions to adapt to ever changing external forces. The prescriptive literature strongly advocates strategic planning as the key to superior performance. Strategic planning is a management tool, and has evolved in

higher education through adaptation of practices in the business world (Rowley, Lujan & Dolence, 1997). This is a process that focuses on strategic and operational goals, objectives and strategies based on organizational policies, programs and actions designed to achieve the institution's aims and desirable results. It is argued that it is an extremely important tool for organizational effectiveness (Armacost, Pet-Armacost & Wilson, 2004; Austin, 2002; Bryson, 1988; Bryson & Alston, 1996; Keller, 1983; Hahn & Powers, 1999; Peterson, 1980, 1993, 1995, 1999a,b; van Vught, 1988).

Some educators have suggested that perhaps the values of the academic culture should not encompass such a concept as strategic planning (Birnbaum, 2000). One cannot forget the uniqueness of a higher education institution as stressed by Keller (1997). Academic institutions are perceived as having ambiguous goals (Cohen & March, 1974), loosely coupled structures (Weick, 1976), different traditions as well as structures (Clark, 1983) and contradictory functions (Castells, 2001). While it is recognized that higher education institutions are historically collegial organizations, it is also recognized that the collegial system needs to support accountability and institutional responsibility, or even be more managerial in order to face the challenges of the future (Gibbons, 1994).

Literature on planning, organizational culture, high involvement management and organizational effectiveness provides a setting to examine why planning offers higher education a strategic tool when it functions as an integrated process for identifying, explicating, and mediating values that address specifically the higher education decision-making culture (Morril, 1988).

What holds true for the European systems of higher education? According to Zaharia (2002, 302):

“European universities are currently experiencing a period of turmoil caused by the need to reconcile the characteristics of traditional higher education and the new educational requirements that are being defined by the society of the Third Millennium.”

Facing this scenario, it appears the solution for meeting the continuous demands on higher education institutions is the essential need for them to embrace a greater management capacity. Authors such as Amaral, Magalhães and Santiago (2003, 131) argue for “[...] the need to provide institutions with management instruments and processes allowing for a more flexible and effective administration”, but they add “in the latter case, the management tools and processes will remain instruments at the service of the institution and its leadership, without assuming a dominant role as determinants of the institution's objectives and strategies.” But even this may not be sufficient to avoid changes of the academic's basic loyalties, as Amaral, Fulton and Larsen (2003, 291) caution: “As universities increase their penetration of the marketplace, academics will increasingly be seen as ‘intellectual workers’, forced to direct their loyalty, not to their academic peers in their department or discipline, but to the institutions that pay their salaries and demand the lion's share of the economic value they produce.”

Higher Education in Europe

Higher education institutions are among the world's oldest organizations. The historical origins go back to the Medieval Ages in Europe (van Vught, 1991). According to Altbach (2004, 4), “all the universities in the world today, with the exception of the Al-Azhar in Cairo, stem from the same historical roots – the Medieval European university.” Even though the historical roots of the university lay in the Medieval Ages, according to Bowden

and Marton (1998, 3), the foundation of the modern university was established in Berlin in 1809, when Wilhelm von Humboldt proclaimed the guiding principles to be the “independent status of staff” and the “free choice of subjects.” Also according to Amaral (2002), the modern university has its origins in the reforms of von Humboldt in Prussia and Napoleon in France. Enders (2002, 3), points out “the contemporary university was born of the nation state, not of medieval civilization, and it was only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, following the establishment of clear national economic interests, that universities acquired their identification with science and technology.” Scott (1999, 123) states that “three quarters of the existent universities, even the universities in Europe, have been established since 1900; half since 1945.”

Today there are some differences within the European higher education systems. In the origins of the systems we know today, there are three models: the Humboldtian model characterized by freedom for professors and students with respect to study and teaching, the Anglo-Saxon approach characterized by a very high level of autonomy and low state intervention, and the Napoleonic model characterized by a centralized approach. In the last thirty years, the European systems experienced a diversification. Alongside universities, more vocational institutions appeared in the form of Fachhochschulen in Germany and more recently in Austria, Hogescholen in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium), Technology Institutes in Ireland and Polytechnic Institutes in the UK and Portugal. In Spain, vocational studies were developed inside the universities. In fact, Barnett stated (1994, 7), “higher education is now offered by a diverse range of institutions with their own ethos and mission.”

With respect to the organization of the European higher education systems, Zaharia (2002, 304-305) points out:

“Generally speaking, in all countries higher education activity is structured at three levels: that of the ministry (department), that of consultive bodies, and that of the higher education institutions themselves (universities, “higher schools”, institutes for studies of short duration, etc). ...All measures regarding higher education are presented for consultation to a large number of bodies....In all the countries of the European Union, universities are administered democratically in ways that include participation of the academic staff, of students and of lay representatives. Universities are usually directed by an elected president or rector.”

The previous statement on organization assumes particular relevance to the autonomy of institutions. The concept of autonomy assumes particular relevance when discussing the governance and management of higher education institutions within Europe. According to Buchbinder (1998, 100), “the achievement of autonomy is tied to both internal and external forces, the influence of political economy, and the internal structures and dynamics of governance within the university.” There are two approaches to defining autonomy – political and contextual (Neave, 1988c). Bleiklie (2004, 4) stressed, “the essence of institutional autonomy is not to be found in specific administrative or organizational arrangements, but in its actual functioning with regard to the protection of values.” It is interesting to note that autonomy is intrinsically connected with values. Also Bleiklie differentiates several forms of autonomy operating together, sometimes in conflict within a higher education institution. According to the author, there is the autonomy of the institution and individual autonomy of the members of the professional communities within the institution. A motivation for autonomy was noted by Gornitzka and Maassen (2000, 270) who stressed, “autonomy of universities and colleges is based on the idea that government is overloaded and

therefore ‘technical’ decisions can be left to the universities and colleges themselves”. Other authors like Sporn (2003) emphasize de-regulatory convergence based on greater institutional autonomy, entrepreneurialism and external evaluation.

Magalhães (2001, 112) finds that autonomy does not have exactly the same meaning for the American system and the Western European systems. According to the author, autonomy to the American system “[...] is more than a claim, but a reality. On the contrary, the Western European systems – either continental or British, either Jacobian or Humboldtian [...] have taken ‘autonomy’ to mean mainly academic freedom (freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to search for the truth wherever it takes one) the state being not a menace to that exercise but its main guarantee”.

Another perspective is articulated by van Vught (1988), who describes authority in continental Europe as having strong bureaucracy at the top, guild-like authority at the bottom and minimal authority in the middle levels of the hierarchy. The problem in European systems surfaces when decisions are needed. Loosely coupled institutions with strong authority at the bottom find it difficult to reach decisions. Clark (1983, 134) suggests decisions in European HEIs are “produced more by senatorial courtesy than by rectorial muscle.”

The vast majority of the European systems are public and therefore dependent on public financing from their governments. Thus, their autonomy can be compromised. Burton Clark (1995) called attention to the fact that autonomy can be exploited from the financial dimension. Some authors suggest that the sources of funding should be diversified in order to protect institutional autonomy (Goedegebuure *et al.*, 1994b).

It may, perhaps, be time to discuss the alternative of equipping the academic administrators, before they assume office, with the strategic planning support and leadership skills that will allow them to manage effectively.

Higher Education Issues within the European Context

Two important trends that have impacted higher education within the European Union are enrollment rates and spending patterns. Data from the OECD (2000) show dramatic enrollment increases through the first half of the 1990’s throughout the EU and accession countries. These data also show that, with the lone exception of France, private expenditures have outpaced public expenditures for higher education. However, it must be noted that future demographic forecasts would suggest a point of natural saturation is on the horizon for European higher education (Kwiek, 2003).

Within the European context, several important issues surrounding higher education can be identified (Kaiser *et al.*, 2003). First, the majority of institutions and systems within European higher education are public, and thus receive their powers and authority from the State. According to Scott (1999, 110), “the expansion of HE in almost every country has been intimately linked with the explosive extension of the power and influence of the State since 1945.”

Second, the Bologna Declaration committed the 40+ signing countries (initially signed by 29) to converge their educational systems. The Bologna Declaration (1999) is a bold attempt to create a viable European Higher Education Area by the year 2010 in an effort to position Europe as a leading worldwide economy. This is the first of several key trends and developments identified by UNESCO-CEPES (2003) as vital to the advancement of European higher education. Essentially, the Declaration of Bologna hopes to create greater compatibility and transparency between degrees and diplomas from participating countries, establish a two-cycle degree structure, secure the stability of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), implement a standardized quality assessment strategy across countries,

eliminate impediments to mobility between countries and develop a European higher education dimension

(http://www.bolognabergen2005.no/PDF/00Main_doc/0105Lourtie_report.pdf;
<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>; UNESCO-CEPES, 2003).

The Bologna Declaration has three general goals: employability, competitiveness and mobility (Nóvoa, 2002). However for now, as stressed by van der Wende (2003, 3), “the resistance to harmonization and standardization [...] seems to remain, at least at the political level.” She further states “European actions in higher education have expanded over the last decades in terms of their reach across policy levels and geographical borders. Increased international competition urged national governments to enhance cooperation in order to achieve greater cohesion between higher education systems, Europe being an obvious level for joint action.”

The Bologna Declaration also raises some concerns. In fact, despite the known aspirations of the Bologna Declaration that deserve serious consideration as a vehicle to consolidate European citizenship, to promote social and human development, and European competitiveness, it would appear that behind the public agenda of Bologna there is more than an effort to build a competitive area of higher education, and that the process might be dominated by the economic agenda (Amaral, 2004). Therefore the national systems need to be attentive to the future directions that the process is going to take.

Third is the issue of quality. The European countries have created a great many national quality assurance systems, but few adequately address the growing internationalization of higher education. The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA, with the support of the European Union, has been establishing comparative indicators in order to increase the exchange of information and experiences between the member countries (<http://www.enqa.net/>). UNESCO-CEPES (2003) has called for a pan-European framework that will address the issues of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications on the national, regional and international levels.

Fourth, student mobility and the transfer of credits between countries may have become somewhat diluted over the past 20 years or so. Originally, credit transfer was based on “equivalency.” This was reduced to “recognition,” and has now been replaced with “acceptance.” The ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) aims at creating a transparent system whereby student learning achievements can be uniformly analyzed and accepted across participating countries. A six-year pilot study involving 145 HEIs has validated the process. As of 1997, all European institutions were able to participate in the program.

Fifth, new technologies and particularly the growth of the Internet are putting an emphasis on one increasingly commercial educational market. For example in Europe, the UK, German and French open universities are significant providers of online programs. Outside of Europe and particularly in the USA, Canada and Australia, the degrees offered by Internet are growing as well (Taylor & Machado, 2000). The rapid growth of alternative, trans-national educational providers (TNEs) presents a formidable and increasing challenge for traditional European HEIs. As long as HEIs hesitate to engage this lifelong learning market, these alternative providers will continue to expand, often with lesser quality, but a growing market-share (UNESCO-CEPES, 2003).

Sixth, as emphasized by Psacharopoulos (1998) and Johnstone (2003), financing is a major issue all around the world. European HE systems are also under financing pressure. According to Scott (1999, 110), “today universities are more dependent than ever on national governments for their budgets. As HE has expanded and its aggregate budget has increased, the pressure has grown for greater productivity and efficiency.” Stakeholders, particularly students, are expressing expectations regarding State responsibility as a provider of public services toward higher education (UNESCO-CEPES, 2003). The advent of plural funding

strategies involves the encouragement of HEIs to raise additional private income to supplement normal budgets.

Seventh, the relative stability that higher education enjoyed over the past five decades has ended. Today, transforming change is occurring that the academy must cope with. Led perhaps by the USA, more and more of the systems of higher education throughout the world are being influenced by powerful market forces. Increasing autonomy and competition for students is putting more responsibility on HEIs to maintain a distinctive advantage. With this responsibility are also growing demands for accountability. Market forces have their own momentum and are here to stay (Kwiek, 2003). The benefits and costs of markets in higher education are emphasized by Dill, Teixeira, Jongbloed and Amaral (2004, 349) in the Conclusions of the volume on *Markets in Higher Education: Rhetoric or Reality?* It is stated:

“Overall, there are good reasons to believe that a dogmatic and ideologically rooted approach to markets is unwise. Markets are neither the magic potion that will solve all problems in higher education, nor the personification of evil. If market forces have created serious imbalances and tensions in the systems that wholeheartedly embraced them, attempts to avoid market competition have led several systems to something of a dead end. Markets are one important and viable instrument of steering higher education systems in the twenty-first century, especially in order to complement government’s function [...] Both markets and governments have a contribution to make to higher education regulation and both have costs and benefits. The appropriate balance between these two modes of conduct has to be continually reassessed, based on the purposes that society wishes higher education to fulfill”.

There are clear signals of the influence of the market in the higher education sector (Dill, 2003; Kwiek, 2003; McGuinness, 1997). McGuinness (1997, 341), in a comparison study between Europe and the USA, defends that there are clear trends for the “[...] increased reliance on market forces to direct the system.” This holds true in the USA, as well as Europe. Other authors consider that, at least in Europe, the situation is still a far cry from a real higher education market. For instance, Trow (1996, 310) declares, “[...] an element of market links can be found in most American institutions, though concealed or obscured by other kinds of linkages. Markets are still a relatively minor factor in Europe, which on the whole does not provide a market for higher education, and whose governments rather dislike the idea of a market for higher education and its potential effects on quality and status.” Even in the case of the UK where Margaret Thatcher has introduced ingredients of “market” rhetoric – value for money, efficiency gains, students as customers – Trow (*ibid*) considers that: “[...] government in the UK employs the rhetoric of the market in connection with higher education, but since government controls the price universities can place on their services, and the amount and variety of services they can sell, universities currently operate not in a market but in something like a command economy.”

A more reasonable position is to consider that despite the fact that no true higher education markets have been implemented governments are increasingly using “market-type” mechanisms as instruments of public policy, which have strong effect over the higher education institutions. In the words of Dill (1997, 178), “[...] while the superiority of these instruments (market mechanisms) to traditional forms of government regulation are yet to be clearly demonstrated, the adoption of these new types of market policies will likely have significant impact upon academic systems.”

Some authors are clearly pro-market, demanding that higher education institutions need to focus their management needs in a more entrepreneurial manner (Sporn, 1999b).

According to Sporn (1999, 30), “In Europe, entrepreneurial behavior will increasingly be the response to this new environment. Management structures and more adaptive capacity are designed to deal with these complex challenges.” Others authors like Meek (2003, 197) are rather skeptical about the advantages of these new policies: “While market considerations are driving governance and management reforms in Australian higher education, the long-term efficiency of such an approach can be questioned.”

Finally as a consequence of globalization, some other issues relating to higher education around the world are surfacing in European higher education as well. UNESCO-CEPES (2003) has called for increased recognition of the need for proactive efforts to develop a new generation of policies and laws on higher education. Among the issues are massification, internationalization and globalization (Scott, 1999). As stated by Gibbons (1998, 30), “the globalisation of the economy and the pressures of international competition are dissolving boundaries between nations, institutions and disciplines, creating a distributed knowledge production system that is becoming increasingly global [...] [and] universities are part of this system.”

The knowledge society (or economy) is characterized by the belief that wealth is more properly defined in terms of knowledge development and dissemination than by human and physical capital. According to Altbach and Teichler (2001, 24), “[...] higher education is a central element in the knowledge based global economy.” The European Union recognizes the increasing importance of the knowledge society. The Lisbon Declaration developed by the European Council (2000), set the goal “[...] to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth” (http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm).

The European higher education system cannot avoid the reality of international competition and the myriad challenges that will pose in the future. Another challenge comes under the General Agreement on Trade in Services-GATS (GATS, 2001). The general goal of GATS is the liberalization of trade through a reduction of government interference and an increase in international competition. One of the 12 sectors identified in the agreement is educational services. Considerable discussion and consternation are being evidenced within the higher education community with respect to the impact this agreement might have on them (http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/serv_e.htm). The inclusion of higher education as a part of GATS and its implications is an ongoing discussion. According to Altbach (2004, 22), “GATS seeks to establish ‘open markets’ for knowledge products of all kinds – including higher education. [...] GATS and related arrangements also seek to provide a legally binding framework for the circulation of educational services and for the protection of intellectual property.” Some authors emphasize the benefits while others perceive GATS as a threat to education (Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2002).

Additionally, traditional-aged males from upper middle and professional classes no longer dominate the typical student cohort. Today, the social base is much broader, the proportion of women has increased dramatically and the graduates of HEIs tend more often to enter the mid-level work force rather than the elite stratus of leadership (Blackmore, 2002; Gibbons, 1998).

In these circumstances, several authors state the need for the European systems to give more attention to their management. Rhoades and Sporn (2002, 3) point out that “...there has been growing interest in Europe in more ‘professionalized’ models of management.” Also Cowburn (2005, 103) stressed: “Traditional European universities have long exhibited a notoriously weak capacity to steer themselves. As their complexity has increased and the pace of change accelerated, that weakness has become more debilitating, deepening the need for greater managerial capacity.”

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

The demands on higher education are putting a big responsibility on governance and management at the institutional level (van Vught, 2003). According to Rasmussen (1998, 38), “much has been said about the necessity of using strategic management in the steering of the universities today. Words like ‘entrepreneurial’ (Davis, 1995), ‘innovative’ (Clark, 1996), ‘corporate style’ and ‘managerialism’ (de Boer, 1996), ‘business-like’ (Geurts & Maassen, 1996), and ‘external orientation’ have been used to stress the importance of managing universities in accordance with the very dynamic societies of which they are indeed a part.” These are times of rapid change. It is precisely in times of transformation that formal planning strategies are most needed in the higher education system. The increased environmental ambiguity requires educational institutions and other public entities to think and to act strategically as never before (Bryson, 1988).

As organizations, institutions of higher education differ substantially from business organizations where strategic planning has flourished more than diminished. Much has been written in recent years about the unique organizational features of higher education. Of particular note, expectations of collegiality and shared governance provoke a distinctly different picture of institutions of higher education than for the business sector. Perhaps most noteworthy is the fact that a bottom line mentality, as found in the sphere of competitive business, is replaced in higher education with a culture that can best (perhaps idealistically) be defined as a collegial, academic community of scholars. While this may not always define the reality of institutions, philosophically it still guides attitudes and expectations. Higher education has been able to use strategic planning successfully by combining the basic elements of planning with the unique characteristics of HEIs. By clearly understanding the key differences, institutions of higher education appear to have been able to find adaptive strategic planning approaches (Schmidtlein, 1990).

Keller’s book is considered the Bible of strategic planning in higher education and he is referred to as the Father of the process in higher education. George Keller’s vision in his classic book, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution* represents an appealing scenario:

“The dogma of colleges as amiable, anarchic, self correcting collectives of scholars with a small contingent of dignified caretakers at the unavoidable business edge is crumbling. A new era of conscious academic strategy is being born. The modern college and university scene is one that is no longer so fiercely disdainful of sound economic and financial planning or so derisive of strategic management. Professors and campus administrators are now uniting to design plans, programs, priorities, and expenditures in order to insure their futures.”

Keller (1983, viii-ix)

Planning literature acknowledges the positive role of the process in higher education. The literature suggests that effective planning provides a process for dealing with value conflicts, leads to identifiable results, makes a difference and offers great enrichment and direction to higher education (Bryson, 1988). Planning is perceived as a vehicle for change, the assumption being that an institution will be strengthened, or achieve organizational success as a result of its planning initiative. Strategic planning is a specific method of moving an institution forward in which strategies are formulated and implemented in consideration of the organization’s environmental context, enabling the institution to acquire sufficient resources to attain its goals (Rose, 2003; Taylor & Miroiu, 2002).

The concept of strategic planning emerged in the business sector in the late 1950's (Mintzberg, 1994). Its popularity grew rapidly as companies used this new management tool to achieve comparative advantages. Public and non-profit organizations recognized the usefulness of strategy formulation during the 1980's. Most well known models of public and non-profit strategic planning have their roots in the Harvard policy model developed at the Harvard Business School (Bryson, 1988). In the late 1970's, it began to dominate higher education literature on planning. In the 1980's, it became popular in higher education in the USA (Chaffee, 1985a). According to Watson (2000, 14):

“Managing strategy is arguably the most important thing a college or university does, enabling all of its core activities of teaching, research and a wider social and economic service to be optimally achieved. It involves a thorough knowledge of the institution's present strengths and weaknesses and the making of choices about the future. ... A sound, well expressed strategy will encapsulate the institution's self-identity, gather business and win friends.”

George Keller, with his book, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution* (1983), brought the concept of strategic planning to the attention of higher education. Before that, there were only discussions of the applicability of strategic planning to higher education (Steiner, 1979b; Young, 1981). Keller (1983, 151) says that strategic planning places the fate of the institution above all else:

“Strategic planning places the long-term vitality and excellence of the college or university first. It cares about traditions, faculty salaries, and programs in Greek, agriculture, and astrophysics. But it cares about institutional survival more, so that there will be places for scholars of Greek, agriculture, and astrophysics to teach and do their research. Scholars cannot easily hang their shingle out like physicians or architects [...]. Professors still need to unite as a universitas.”

Authors like Austin (2002); Keller (1983); Meredith (1985); Peterson (1999b); Rowley Lujan and Dolence (1997) stressed why it is advantageous for higher education institutions to engage in strategic planning as a process by which campuses can strengthen their competitive advantage. According to Tan (1990), strategic planning may encourage the clarification of existing goals and serve to develop the institution's mission, and thus reduce ambiguity. The author emphasizes the sense of positivism that is spawned and nurtured when major institutional matters are clarified, confidence and security are strengthened and internal and external images are enhanced. According to Shirley (1988), strategic planning describes a type of process that focuses on a melding of external opportunities and trends, internal strengths and weaknesses, and personal values of staff and community. The strategic concept presumes an ongoing substantive and purposeful moment whereby an organization seizes its strategic opportunity through design, rather than chance (Mintzberg, 1994; Peterson, 1989). Mintzberg (1994) has said that strategic planning can play roles such as providing analysis to managers, helping translate intended strategies into realized ones, and providing a control device, but that it is not effective for the development of strategy.

Planning embodies the concept that the institution will be strengthened to achieve organizational success as a result. Strategic planning is often characterized as proactive with a precept that emphasizes the need for proactive movement and the strengthening of the organization (Peterson, 1989). An effective strategic planning process provides a framework within which quality tools and processes can be utilized (Gibson, 2002). Many theorists believe that the adoption of the planning process is imperative for the survival of higher

education institutions (Keller, 1983; Rowley, Lujan & Dolence, 1997; Shirley, 1988; Schmidtlein, 1990).

The factors that influence the adoption of planning were outlined by numerous authors: organizational complexities and external constraints; scarce financial resources, a process that improves the quality of decisions made as well as the quality of the decision-making process; new technologies; developing cross-industry relationships; globalization of higher education; a conduit that keeps the units working in harmony toward the same end; and finally the post-industrial environment's turbulence, competitiveness, lean resources and unpredictability.

Several benefits from involvement in planning appear consistently in the literature. These include clarification of the institution's mission; improved ability for the institution to face challenges, to be proactive and to actively shape its own destiny; the capability to manage change and innovation; the capacity to support decision-making; the strengthening of leadership; help with the allocation of resources; the improvement of institutional quality assurance measures; and overall enhancement of the ability of the institution to think and act strategically (Rowley, Lujan & Dolence, 1997).

Institution-wide planning processes were implemented in higher education during the 1980's in the USA as a means of addressing growing demographic, economic and social pressure, and as a result of an increasingly complex internal environment coupled with growing constraints in the external environment. Bryson (1988) cautioned that because strategic planning was developed in the business sector, careful attention must be given to any attempts at the application of those models in public and non-profit sectors. Accordingly, each planning process should reflect the individual organization's environment. Bryson has developed an eight step strategic planning model designed specifically for public and non-profit organizations. The Bryson strategic planning model can provide a mechanism for the identification of important internal and external issues. It can facilitate recognition of organizational strengths and weaknesses and help to identify major opportunities.

There are a number of criticisms levelled at the use of strategic planning in higher education, many of which are similar to those mentioned by practitioners and researchers in the business sector (Birnbaum, 2000). Authors like Meredith (1985) and Schmidtlein (1990) refer to and argue against some of those criticisms. Peterson, Dill, Mets and Associates (1997) were warning that strategic planning was not always working as well for higher education as had been hoped. In higher education, much of the criticism of strategic planning derives from the belief that a model arising from military roots and grounded in organizational success as defined by profitability could not translate into higher education, where goals may be ambiguous and not easily measured, where the organization is loosely coupled, institutional leaders lack control over major processes, internal and external constraints exist, and where resources are inflexible (Schmidtlein, 1990).

Despite the criticism arising about strategic planning within HEIs, scholars claim that effective strategic planning is what separates the average from the above average, and makes planning institutions emerge as leading institutions (Keller, 1997). Hunt *et al.* (1997, 11-12) refer to several reasons why strategic planning should be considered for a higher education institution:

- 1 *"To improve performance toward meeting the mission statement;*
- 2 *To improve performance toward increasing the academic standing of the institution;*
- 3 *To increase accomplishments with the same or lower level of resources;*
- 4 *To clarify the future direction of the institution;*
- 5 *To meet the requirements of accreditation or of a government agency;*

- 6 To solve major problems (threats) or address significant opportunities facing the institution;
- 7 To provide an opportunity for leadership such as the time of the appointment of a new president; and
- 8 To bring the university community together in a cooperative effort.”

As noted by Cowburn (2005), one of the main reasons strategic planning does not succeed as often as it might is that idealized thinking tends to get in the way of reality. Reality is telling HEIs that government support is and will continue to be insufficient to support the full array of goals and objectives within an institutional plan. It is also telling them they can no longer hope to be all things to all people; that HEIs need more differentiation through focused missions.

The concepts of strategic thinking, management and planning permeate discussions about how HEIs should be led and managed. During the 1980's, according to Salter and Tapper (2000, 69-70), “A new discourse of governance began to emerge where the language of economics and management sought to replace that of ‘professionalism’, ‘administration’ and the ‘public interest’. In large part the discourse was borrowed from the private sector [...]. The effect of the discourse and the values it embodied was to discredit the established model of centralized bureaucratic welfare delivery and to promote what became known as New Public Management characterized by a system of devolved management, responsive to consumer pressures and capable of utilizing market mechanisms within an overall structure of contractual accountability.” Therefore in higher education institutions, New Public Management (also known as managerialism) has surfaced as a new issue with the transformation of institutions (particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries) from a bureaucratic and professional orientation to one more focused on market demands and an entrepreneurial spirit (Amaral, Meek & Larsen, 2003).

New managerialism facilitates the deconstruction of bureaucratic hierarchies (Reed, 2002) that invariably produce roadblocks to effective planning. This new and quite divergent orientation suggests the *status quo* where academics are elevated to managerial and leadership positions within the institution, must give way to the introduction of more productive and flexible administrative practices. It may well be that academics, buttressed with a comprehensive institutional strategic plan, could generate the effective and adaptive forms of leadership that the New Managerialism advocates are suggesting. Clearly, any form of leadership is better guided with a plan, a road map, or a navigational compass. Given this advantage, it is quite conceivable that managerialism is really a matter of providing the academic leadership with the strategic direction they need through a planning process. The dialogue seems endless about the dichotomy between academic leadership and a new managerialism.

The managerial revolution is a reality and a need. Interestingly, while HEIs have moved closer to the industrial pattern of organization with senior management teams, strategic plans, line managers and cost centers, corporations have become more collegial in their approach to management. This revolution has created an institutional and managerial energy that both competes with and compliments the academic community. This movement in concert with traditional institutional bureaucracy has fabricated a more complex modern institutional structure that has not been seen before (Gibbons, 1998). Perhaps this apparent divergence between managerial coherence and intellectual incoherence conceals a possibility for promise. Could it be that a strengthened institutional management component will buttress the waning coherence of scientific inquiry? As stated by Magalhães (2001b, 380), “[...] the world is becoming post-modern, uncertainty of what counts as knowledge and what counts as science is undermining higher education which is being forced consequently to deal with the

re-definition of its social role and its institutional mission.” Institutions of higher education need the clarity and focus of systematic and strategic planning initiatives in order to chart their direction in these evolving times. There seems to be no viable alternative.

The Case of Portugal

The origin of Portuguese universities traces back to the middle of the 13th Century. Portuguese higher education today is organized into public and non-public HEIs. Under public higher education, there are universities, polytechnic institutes, and military and police schools. Private and cooperative higher education includes universities and other establishments. There is also a multi-campus Catholic university with a unique status.

Portuguese higher education is no exception to what was stressed in the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* (1998), “Everywhere higher education is faced with great challenges and difficulties related to financing, equity of conditions of access into and during the course of studies, improved staff development, skills-based training, enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching, research and services, relevance of programs, employability of graduates, establishment of efficient cooperative agreements and equitable access to the benefits of internal cooperation.” (*ibid*, 1). In these circumstances, the need for strategic planning in Portuguese higher education is emphasised by Marçal Grilo (2003, 11), who states “only with strong leadership and strategic planning is it possible to increase the role of the universities in our modern society.”

In Portugal, according to the Decree-Law 183/96 and Law 113/97, public HEIs are required to submit a Development Plan that is, essentially, a rudimentary framework for a strategic plan. The guidelines, or VADEMECUM, for the development of this document are clear and constructive. Amaral, as reported in *Politécnica do Instituto Politécnico de Leiria* in an article summarizing the seminar on “Development and Quality of Higher Education- Rethinking Higher Education” (2002), indicated that to his knowledge development plans done as requested and following the guidelines of the VADEMECUM and presented to the Ministry have so far produced no results at all. Later evidence obtained from HEIs in the course of our earlier research (Machado, Taylor & Farhangmehr, 2004a,b; Machado, et .al, 2005) would suggest these guidelines are not always being properly adhered to. Perhaps more importantly, the Ministry is ignoring these procedural transgressions, and inappropriate submissions are being accepted without comment. Personal communication with senior leaders of HEIs suggests these documents are not given serious consideration, if read at all, and nothing of importance results from their submission. Furthermore, there is no such law concerning private higher education institutions.

Until this research by the authors, no studies on institutional planning had been conducted in the setting or unique context of the Portuguese higher education system (Machado, Farhangmehr & Taylor, 2004a). The study by the authors involved interviews and surveys of HEIs across Portugal with respect to their understanding of and involvement in the process of institutional planning. Some of the findings are related below. For a more detailed analysis of the research, the reader is referred to Machado, Farhangmehr and Taylor, 2004a,b; Machado, Taylor and Farhangmehr, 2004; Machado, Farhangmehr and Taylor, 2005; and Machado, Taylor, Farhangmehr and Wilkinson, 2005.

Most institutions in Portugal included in this study indicated their process started at the top of the organizational structure and worked its way down, with some mixture of feedback and input coming up from the bottom. A plausible explanation for this might be that public institutions are responding to a directive (the VADEMECUM) from the Ministry in charge of higher education that would suggest the need for a response orchestrated from the

leadership of the public HEIs. Most of the Development Plan documents examined did not meet the criteria of a strategic plan, however.

An examination of the strategic planning institutions reveals a top-down process where the leadership was clearly in charge of the process. The mission statement was routinely documented; however, many institutions made reference to the published statements in the statutes regarding duties and responsibilities. It is the researchers' opinion these do not constitute mission statements, and therefore many HEIs were, in reality, without one.

With respect to variables that affect planning, the HEIs surveyed suggested the most often noted was the lack of financial resources. This was especially emphasized by the public HEIs. Between institutional types, lack of financial resources along with human and technological resources were statistically significant. Another variable noted as having a very large influence on what institutions can and cannot do was governmental regulations.

In the broadest sense, it is believed that the concept of strategic planning within the Portuguese higher education enterprise is only beginning to evolve. While some sincere efforts were found, they were accompanied by naive misunderstandings, inflated self-reporting and fragmented implementation in many cases. While a minority of HEIs was actually pursuing a strategic planning process, many expressed a respect for it and a desire to begin. One must wonder if it is a preferred activity, why it is not being pursued by more HEIs. Two thoughts come to mind. First, it may simply be "trendy" to be pro-planning and responses were no more than efforts to be mainstream. Second, a full understanding of how to proceed may have been absent and HEIs simply did not know how to proceed with the process.

Conclusions

Institutional planning has evolved and matured in the United States over recent decades. In fact, the progress that has been made is so significant compared with many higher education systems throughout the world that a disconnect has materialized. Internationalization has brought students, scholars, institutions and other partners together throughout the world in meaningful ways. This must also occur within the arena of planning. It is important for those in the United States who are fully engaged in advancing institutional planning to recognize the enormous chasm that separates their progress with the neophyte aspirations of some other countries. European countries are at different stages of development, but virtually all of them recognize the merits of properly executed institutional planning. Many are struggling to find ways to turn their aspirations into realities. This does not mean that those well-versed in the process can simply parachute into other countries and transform them through lock-step consulting approaches. It's not that simple. In fact, a few failed attempts to introduce planning in other countries can change optimism into pessimism very quickly and curtail further interest.

First and perhaps most important, as a general rule, European higher education is a bit distrustful of the American system. Many Europeans view U.S. involvement abroad in higher education not as an effort toward "internationalization," but rather "Americanization." They consider U.S. higher education clearly the strongest in the world, but also excessively homogenized so that it is hard to differentiate the majority of institutions one from the other. Mission drift and an overzealous affinity for a market-driven mentality are seen as driving forces Europeans are not sure they want introduced into their systems (Machado, et .al, 2005). It should be pointed out that the market is becoming a force in Europe, but it is confronting obstacles from the lingering welfare state that are impeding its progress.

Second, the planning expertise from the business sector is more established and mature than that found within higher education. The business sector could probably make

meaningful contributions to planning in European higher education institutions with a little additional effort. That effort would involve learning the obvious and subtle differences between the cultures of business and higher education. This should start with a grasp of the nuances found within the States, then be followed by an examination of Europe. Ultimately, and before networking with Europe, one would be advised to examine the higher education culture within the specific country they will engage. The diversity between countries in Europe is far greater than that between states in the U.S. With this preparation would come a cultural sensitivity that would be well-received abroad.

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