THE SWOT MODEL OF STRATEGIC PLANNING: A PANACEA FOR ENHANCING EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a road map for the top management staff in the administrative echelon to enhance the quality of their managerial competence in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is the intention of the paper to create awareness among the top management administrators that the SWOT model of strategic planning is the best option for the achievement of efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness of tertiary institution management in Nigeria. Basically, the paper discusses the following: the meaning of strategic planning, the concept of SWOT, purpose of SWOT, why we need the SWOT analysis, phases/process of the SWOT model of strategic planning. The paper provides theoretical framework for effective and efficient management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria through the systematic application of SWOT model of strategic planning for enhancing quality assurance and service delivery in tertiary education in Nigeria. The paper also concludes by making some recommendations.

Planning is a fundamental activity in human enterprises. Basically every mature person engages in one type of plan or the other. Individuals make plans for important life activities such as building a house, getting married, acquiring education, setting up some business, taking a trip (Mgbodile, 2004:1). There are group plan towards group objectives such as establishing joint business ventures, erecting residential buildings and undertaking group farming projects. Communities embark on community plans to solve common problems or to satisfy community needs. Such plans include pipe borne water, rural electrification, health centres, and school projects among others.

Governments as well make plans to cater for the needs and problems of the people or to provide needed essential services and amenities such as transportation, health care delivery, agriculture and food production, education, roads, water and electricity.

We often hear causal statements or comments from people on planning. Such statement as: "I didn't plan for it", "It was not in my plan". "We have to plan for it", "I wonder if there were good plan for this"; "the thing reflects poor planning", "the planners did a good job" etc reflect some notions of the concept of planning in the minds of the people. It as well shows that people generally recognize the need and importance of planning for the attainment of goals and objectives.

What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning can be described as the process of making informed decisions and preparations about the future of an organization (Ngwu, 2O09). The term "strategy" was first used in the military to describe the grand plan for winning a war, but in recent times the 'term strategy' has been generally applied to business firms and other organizations including education. Strategic plans are concerned with broad matters that virtually affect the development of an organization (Mgbodile, 2O07): It concerns itself with the establishment of broad organizational objectives and the forecasting of the environment in which the

objectives are to be achieved as well as determining the ways in which the objectives are to be realized.

Strategic planning can also be seen as that aspect of corporate planning which involves the assessment of needs, the identification of desired outcome, and the assignment of priorities of various programmes, initiatives and resources towards the attainment of global objectives (Mgbodile, 2007). An organization's strategic plan or grand strategy, as it is sometimes called, serves to define its overall character, mission and direction. The grand strategy refers to the organization's overall plan for dealing with and existing in an environment.

Strategic planning functions are performed by top management in the administrative echelon such as ministers or commissioners for education, directors of education, heads of institutions such as Vice-Chancellors, Rectors, Provosts, Principals of secondary schools or Headmasters of primary schools, Deans of faculties and Heads of Department, Secretary, National Universities Commission, (NUC), the school boards etc.

In strategic planning serious attention is paid to relatively uncontrollable social, economic and technological factors that impinge on an organization's performance. Thus, in strategic planning, the emphasis is on predicting the future behaviour or external variables and the formulation of alternatives course(s) of action in the light of expected events. It is in this light that a strategic plan can be seen as an intended relationship between the organization and its environment.

To design an effective strategic plan, top management must recognize and examine critically all aspects of the organization's life that need to be improved in order to continue to satisfy stakeholders and customer needs and interests, or maintain an edge over its competitors. According to Ejieh in Ngwu (2009) strategic management applied to schools is a process of examining the schools environment, establishing a setting desired goals and objectives, and developing an action plan for achieving the set objectives. Strategic management (planning) is designed to help an organization, including the tertiary institution, to do its job in a better or more effective way. It is a way of ensuring that the energy of all employees' remains focused, that they are working toward the same goal and that necessary adjustments in the organization's direction are made in response to a changing environment. Ngwu (2009) further stated that the process is strategic because it involves preparing the best way of responding to a school's changing environment. It is about planning because it involves deliberately setting goals and objectives (i.e. choosing a desired future) and developing effective means of achieving them. It involves getting information about the present, anticipating the environment in which the school will be functioning in future, making fundamental decisions and choosing course(s) of action to meet the challenges of that environment.

Concept of SWOT

SWOT model of strategic planning can be described as a basic straightforward model that provides direction to an organization and serves as a basis for its development (Mgbodile, 2007). SWOT analysis is a useful tool for analyzing an organization's overall situation. According to Certo and Peter (1988), SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This approach attempts to balance the internal strengths and weaknesses of an organization with the opportunities and threats that the external environment presents. This approach suggests that the major issues facing an organization can be isolated through careful analysis of each of these four elements.

Strategies can then be formulated to address these issues.

SWOT constitutes a tool in the hands of any organization to identify, examine and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist within. This means that an organization can employ the SWOT analysis to carry out an x-ray of the strengths existing within it, the weaknesses plaguing it, the untapped opportunities, which the organization has, and the threats facing the corporate existence of the organization. The SWOT analysis provides convenient heading under which to study an organization, and may provide a basis for decision making and problem solving (Mullins, 1995).

Strengths are those positive aspects or distinctive attributes or competencies, which provide a significant advantage in the operations and services of an organization or upon which an organization can build. Examples include quality of staff, quality of students, quality of infrastructure, location advantage, image or reputation, managerial expertise, physical and financial resources among others.

Weaknesses are those negative aspects or deficiencies in the present competences, operations, services, strategies or resources of an organization its image or reputation, which limit its effectiveness and which need to be corrected or need action taken to minimize their effects. These refer to characteristics of the organization such as poor infrastructural facilities, indiscipline on the part of staff or students, a high level of consumer complaints, poor corporate image or reputation.

Opportunities represent the favourable conditions that usually arise from the nature of changes in the environment. They can also represent existing but untapped advantages or strengths existing within or outside the organization, which, if properly identified and harnessed will add to the existing strengths of the organization. These include technology advances, improved economic factors, failure of competitors, land for expansion of agriculture, alumni support, and location advantages etc. Opportunities provide the potential for the organization to offer improved services, develop existing products and facilities, increase its revenue base and achieve better results and more satisfactory services. By searching out opportunities, which match its strengths, the organization can optimize the effects of synergy.

Threats are the converse of opportunities and refer to unfavourable situations arising from internal and external environment, which are likely to endanger the operations and effectiveness of an organization. Examples could be changes in legislation, the introduction of a radically new product by competitors, political or economic unrest, frequent strike by workers, brain drain, cultism, examination malpractices, dwindling pupils/students enrolment, manpower attrition, sagging morale of workers, changing social conditions, the action of pressure groups, recklessness in financial management etc. Organizations need to be responsive to the threats facing it as well as to changes that have already occurred, and plan as well for anticipated significant changes in the environment and to prepare to meet them.

SWOT analysis involves scanning the internal and external environment under which an organization operates. The purpose of internal scanning is to x-ray and assess the weaknesses and strengths in the present operation and life of the organization. The external scanning of the environment focuses on the identification of the threat outside the organization. This might touch on the social, economic and technological factors that might influence or affect operations in the establishment such as societal pressures of the society, perceived societal needs and problems, technological advances, inflationary trends,

value shift, economic and political factors such as depression in the economy, change in government policies etc.

Purpose of SWOT Analysis

The purpose of SWOT analysis is to help an organization to examine critically and analyze realistically the area of weaknesses present in the organization and the threats currently facing the organization's life and operations. The overall aim is to respond to and take adequate care of the weaknesses and threats so identified. The SWOT analysis has also as its purpose to identify the strengths of the organization that is, the areas where the organization is doing very well, and as well as to identify the untapped opportunities available to the organizations. This is with the view to further maintaining the strengths of the organization and exploiting and harnessing the said untapped opportunities. The overall objective is to achieve improvement in all areas of the organization's life and help the organization to survive or compete in the environment favourably.

Why Do We Need the SWOT Analysis in our Organization?

We need the SWOT model of strategic planning in order to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness of our organizations. It is known that many establishments all over the world have adopted strategic planning in various forms to achieve greater improvement and effectiveness of their organizations. Experience has shown that other countries have proved and demonstrated that most advanced and industrialized countries of the world- level IV countries by the classification of Harbinson and Myers in their joint university project on education, manpower and economic growth in Mgbodile (2007) are also the countries which have most systematically adopted and applied the concept

and principles of strategic planning at both the macro and micro enterprises in their national economy. These countries include, the United States of America, Japan, Canada and Germany and to a good extent Britain.

On the other hand, the countries which are classified as the least developed by the United Nations Organization (UNO) indicator system (1986), which incidentally corresponds with the Harbinson and Myers level IV groups, are also the countries which are least exposed to the principles and practice of strategic management in spite of a good number of technology transferred to them by the international donor agencies or their former colonial masters (Mgbodile, 2007). Thus, it has been concluded that it takes more of management than technology to attain economic growth and social change.

Phases Process of the SWOT Model

The phases or the process of SWOT model of strategic planning can be illustrated in the following diagram:
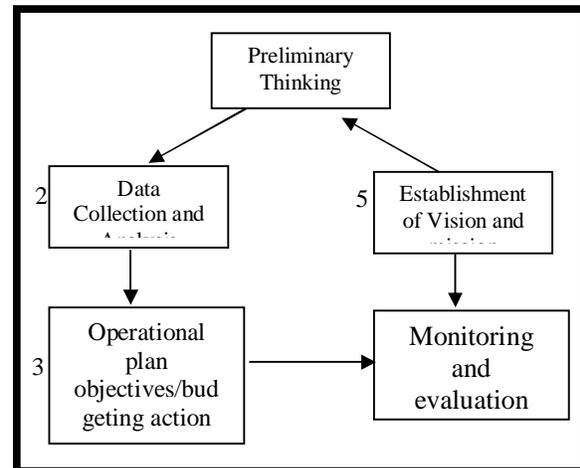

Figure 1 Phases of SWOT

According to the above diagram the first step or stage in the SWOT model planning operation is the preliminary thinking, which might involve taking a global look at the operations of an establishment or organization to determine how far the establishment is moving in terms of the achievement of its set goals and objectives. This will give some insight into the organization's present position vis-à-vis the targeted goals, the competency gaps as well as the limiting factors to operations and goal-achievement. This might also be initiated by the perceived vision or mission of the chief executive for the organization. The operation at this stage is usually the job of the chief executive.

The second stage in the process involves collection and data analysis. If the preliminary thinking exercise reveals that all is not well with an establishment and that it needed improvement, the chief executive which in the case of school system could be the vice-chancellor, the provost, the rector, the principal or the headmaster will initiate action to go into some kind of operation research to seek information in concrete terms and the planning team will undertake a critical review and analysis of their institution to determine its strengths and weaknesses in past operations i.e. what it has achieved and what it has failed to achieve and the limiting factors to the achievement of the goals of the institution. This would lead to the internal and external scanning operations.

Taking the Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki as an example, we will now show how the scanning and other subsequent operations of SWOT take place. In the case of the said university, the scanning operation will touch on academic, administrative and physical facilities areas of the university administration touching on its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as follows:

Strengths
The strength indicators to look for include:
1. Qualification, experiences and number of staff available;
2. The location of the department in relation to their many stakeholders and competitors. Such question as this could be asked, "Is the university location in a commercial, industrial or rural setting"?
3. Availability of infrastructure- buildings, classroom, laboratory facilities,
4. Availability science and technology facilities (internet services)
5. Availability of land for further developments: or for agriculture;
6. Image and reputation of the university and the departments;
7. The quality of its students;
8. High calibre and well-placed alumni;
9. High cost of academic service delivery;
10. Special academic strength-only special area of excellence.

Weaknesses
Here we undertake a thorough examination of the weakness, some of which might include:
1. Lack of equipment and facilities for teaching and research;
2. Lack of staff development
3. Inadequate accommodation and facilities;
4. Low level of financial support;
5. Manpower attrition;
6. Low morale of workers owning to poor remuneration and service conditions;
7. Defective information flow;
8. Poor management style;
9. Poor communication;
10. Poor human relations.
11. Poor financial management.
12. Poor staff morale.
13. Poor infrastructural facilities.
14. Presence of examination malpractices.

15. Excessive Bureaucratic bottleneck in administration.

Opportunities

Here we examine what opportunities abound for future growth and development of the university and its various departments and programmes. Some of the opportunities to look for include:

1. Potential to general income through consultancy services e.g. special programmes such as sandwich, work and study as well as evening programmes and other professional services, university pharmaceutical store, bookshops, printing press, pure water packaging services, canteen services, rental services among others;
2. Potential to attract funds from external sources e.g. UNO, UNESCO, UNICEF etc;
3. Potential to attract fund through internal sources e.g. ETF, PTF etc; Potentials to generate funds through extensive and intensive agriculture e.g. fish farm, poultry farm, crop production etc;
4. Flexibility in course offering and ability to plan courses relevant to the needs of the nation;
5. Ability to attract foreign students;
6. Good-will among the alumni to assist with fund raising activities;
7. Possibility of attracting extra fund support through linkages with industries within and outside Nigeria;
8. Viable Investment;
9. Possibility of shifting from static to dynamic management.

Threats

A thorough examination of threats i.e. limiting factors to university progress and development must be undertaken.

Some of the Threats Include:

1. Decreasing level of government funding;
2. Instability arising from frequent strikes;
3. Exodus of seasoned staff owning to poor service conditions;
4. Inability to attract and retain capable and seasoned staff i.e. inability to recruit and retain the right calibre and number of staff;
5. Poor Internet services;
6. Poor quality of students;
7. Lack of access to modern information technology for example CD-ROM, computer networking, Internet service and current journals;
8. Cultism among students;
9. Increasing wave of examination malpractices;
10. Buying and selling of examination marks;
11. Administrative inefficiency.

External Scanning

The external scanning of the environment will focus on the economic and technology factors outside the university, which presently affect or are likely to affect the life of the university and its operations aimed at the achievement of the university goals. It may also include an examination and analysis of social factor in the external environment, which presently affect or are likely to affect the university and its operations.

The economic factor to consider is the current inflation and its effect on planned programmes and projects and its budgetary implications. The technological factors to consider include the computer technology and their implications for teaching and learning as well as their implications on the administrative practice of the university. There may also be the need to consider such external factors as increased demand for university education, changes in value system, possible cutback or

withdrawal of state government subvention to the university and the implications each of these might have on the continued existence of the university and its ability to discharge its duties.

The third stage of the SWOT process is the operational plan. This involves utilizing the information or data generated in the scanning, of the internal/external environment to formulate an operational plan for the needed action to be taken to bring about the needed improvement. This involves asking some critical questions and making some critical considerations for each of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as follows:

For Each Strength Area We Should Ask the Following Questions
1. How can the organization shield or protect it?
2. How can the organization maximize the advantage?

For Each Weakness Area the Planner Should Be Thinking of:
1. How it can eliminate it?
2. How it can live with it or disguise it?
3. What it prevents the organization from doing?

For Each Opportunity Area the Planner or the Management Should Consider:
1. What prevents the organization from exploiting it?
2. How can the organization best take advantage of it?
3. How long the opportunity may likely remain available?

For Each Threat Area Management Should Ask the Following Questions:
1. What is the worst that is likely to happen?
2. For how long is the threat likely to continue?

3. How can the organization neutralize or eliminate its effects?

Next in the operational plan is specifying what is to be done, what objectives to be achieved, what assignments needed to be given, what committees to be set and what work each is to be assigned, how will their work be monitored and evaluated. There will also be some considerations of the budget and costing of planned projects and operations as well as sources of funds (internal and external). The time schedule for each planned operation must be specified in the operational plan.

The fourth and final stage of the SWOT process is the actual monitoring and evaluation operations. This involves the action of the chief executive, the deans and heads of departments and other monitoring personnel that may be appointed to help in monitoring the actual implementation of the planned operations. The report and observations might lead to the establishment of a new vision/mission of the university.

Conclusion
The importance of the SWOT model of strategic planning in a dynamic environment cannot be over-emphasized. The rapid change in the Nigeria business environment and especially in the education sector calls for new and pragmatic approach to administering organizations and establishments in a manner that makes it possible for them to adapt and exploit emerging challenges and opportunities as they arise. Only the adoption of a proactive planning approach can keep an establishment attuned to changes and developments in their environments. Following the changes in the Nigeria education sector and the increase in the level of uncertainly in the country, the need for constant planning becomes more imperative in order to give our institutions the ability to stimulate, promote and co-ordinate management

efforts as well as offer them the capacity and leverage to effectively address and manage the complexities in their environment (CMD, 2002).

Furthermore, this paper believes that education is a very visible and vulnerable institution with diverse goals. That stakeholders' expectations are continuously changing is a major assumption underlying the principle that a quality organization's vision, mission, and outcomes are driven by stakeholders' expectation. The concept that propels continuous improvement is the necessity for an organization to be alert to its stakeholders continuous changing expectations and to the notion that planning for change must become an active and positive value in the culture (Okeke, 2008).

Conclusively, better administration in an organization such as tertiary institution is facilitated by the effective and efficient application of the phases/process of the SWOT model of strategic planning by articulating a functional framework to move our institutions forward based on:

1. Preliminary thinking- mission/vision
2. Data collection and analysis
3. Operational plan-objective/budgeting action plan
4. Monitoring and evaluation and
5. Establishment of vision/mission.

Recommendations

In view of globalization trend that has tended to unite the world as a village, the SWOT model of strategic planning should be adequately incorporated into the management style of administrators in tertiary institutions in South East-Nigeria. In view of the above discussion, the following recommendations were made.

1. Top management staff should regularly attend conferences, seminars, workshops on strategic management: concepts and applications to improve on their managerial effectiveness and efficiency.
2. Top management staff should endeavour to wear human face. To that extent they should tend towards enhancing meaningful teamwork, clear measurable goals and ensure that there is regular collection and analysis of performance data.
3. Tertiary institutions should institutionalize the regular evaluation of lecturers' instructional effectiveness as an important consideration for the enhancement of quality assurance in the institutions
4. Worker's remuneration should be made attractive and at par with what their counterparts receive in similar institutions.
5. Academic and non-academic staff should interact and ensure that there is cooperation among all members of staff.
6. Lecturers are to professionally grow through conferences, seminars, workshops and research activities among others.

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