



Strategic Plan As The Aspiration Of The Institution: The Language Of A Strategic Plan In The Polytechnic Sector In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the language of a strategic plan as a panacea to achieving the aspiration of the institution in the quest to actualize strategic plan in the polytechnic sector in Nigeria. It is against the backdrop of the fact that judging by the changing trends of events around the world, the use of old methods in running and managing tertiary education across the nation is no more fashionable hence the need to design a new template through a functional strategic plan. A strategic plan involves a coherent, consistent and careful approach to ensure a long term aspirations of the institutions. It is to help institution to capitalize on its strength while minimizing its weakness and to take advantage of opportunities and defend against threats. The paper highlighting the relevance of SWOT in a strategic plan recommended amongst others that giving language greater impetus in the institution's quest to achieve its aspiration remains sacrosanct in the strategic plan.

Keywords: strategic plan, aspiration, tertiary education, language

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that a nation, like an individual, that fails to plan is actually planning to fail. Thus, an institution, the NBTE or any tertiary institution, which fails to strategically plan, is doomed to strategically fail. According to Weihrich, Cannice & Koontz (2008) at the heart of every strategic issues, a fundamental tension between apparent opposites can be identified. A fundamental tension has been identified between the Polytechnic and new technologies, diminishing level of funding and rising cost and turbulent environment of parent organization, etc. Strategy according to Oyeyipo (2009) is a grand plan or a comprehensive course of action detailing the specific moves or routes to be taken by a company to achieve its long term goals and a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). It is therefore against this backdrop of not wanting the institution to fall prey to failure that this paper sets to explore the relevance of the language of a strategic plan to achieving the aspiration of the polytechnic, which is not different from that of NBTE. The polytechnic as an educational institution is established, amongst other core mandates, to the vision of training globally competitive manpower for the development of all sectors and sections of, not just the nation, Nigeria; but also all other nations of the world since many products of the polytechnics are doing great exploits across the world.

Significantly, the essence of the polytechnic as an institution is to provide tertiary education, and as stated by Baba (2018), "polytechnic education as envisioned by the National Board for Technical Education is to promote the production of skilled technical and professional manpower for the development of the national economy. Polytechnic education is a long-on-practice-based training, short-on-theory-based

learning. It is structured to encourage a synergy or symbiotic relationship between the learning environment and the industry.”

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Education

Education in this context consists of an organized activity that promotes learning situation. It is described as the foundation of every society and a basic tool for individual and nation’s life. According to Odiba (2007), “education is the process of learning that assists in the provision of suitable skills, training of the youths for economic, social, cultural and political responsibility, transmission and development of social, economic and cultural structure from generation to generation”. It is a companion no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate and no depression can enslave, (Odiba: 2004)

Tertiary Education/Institution

Tertiary education refers to post-secondary school education. Tertiary institutions are all institutions offering post-secondary school certificate, diploma and degree programmes, (Odiba: 2012). The activities within these institutions are weaved around teaching, learning, research and community services. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN: 2004, 2008, 2009), upholding that tertiary education is the education given after secondary school education in the universities, colleges of Education, Polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses, states the following as the goals for tertiary education in Nigeria:

- i. contributing to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- ii. developing and inculcating proper values for the survival of individuals and society;
- iii. developing the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
- iv. acquiring both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- v. promoting and encouraging scholarship and community service;
- vi. forging and cementing national unity; and
- vii. promoting national and international understanding and interaction.

To realize this laudable aspiration (plan/intention), the tertiary institutions engage in activities such as teaching, research and development, generation and dissemination of knowledge, running full-time, part-time, block releases, day releases, sandwich amongst other programmes, training through SIWES, and other activities aimed at fashioning cordiality between the institutions and their host communities. Achieving these could only happen when managers of the institutions as well as policy makers consciously set out functional plans.

Planning

The term “planning” is a set of activities intended to achieve goals. It a road map that leads one to set goals. Planning is a process that involves setting goals and deciding how best to achieve them. According Kasimu (2011) planning is a process of mapping out in advance pattern of action which, when implemented could lead to the attainment of the goals of an organization. Plan examines and reflects an organization’s values, current status, and environment and relates those factors to the organization’ desired future state, usually expressed in five-ten-year time periods.

Strategic Plan

Strategy according Ifidon (2007) involves how one gets to where one wants to go. It defines the general direction in which an institution chooses to move to meet its goal and realize its objectives. Strategic plan is any plan that outlines methodically the road maps that leads to goal actualization by enhancing performance.

Strategically planning the polytechnic, as an institution to achieve the aspirations of the founding fathers, encompasses the application of rational methods, systematic and systemic analysis through the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in terms of

responding to the needs of the students, staff and the society. Such plan must be strategic and the focal essence of strategic plan is to “ensure continuity and expansion”, (Baba: 2018). Through such plan, which according to Baba (2018) serves as the compass for charting the road map for development and to blend with the 21st century needs; fine tuning, rebranding, demolishing and rebuilding, as well as infusing new dimensions into the polytechnic sector are allowed. Adding credence to the position of Baba (2018), Sokpuwu (2020) asserted that strategic plan ‘positions school administrators with the advantage of having insight into the future, identify trending issues and the need to reposition, rebrand, modify and restructure in order to confront new tasks and set new frontiers.’

Strategic Plan As The Aspiration Of The Institution

Citing the Federal Polytechnic Idah as a sampled case study, the aspiration (vision) of NBTE is to make the institution (institution here refers to the polytechnic sector) a first rate institution (polytechnic) for the training of a disciplined, innovative and self-reliant manpower, (FPI Handbook: 2016). This aspiration cannot be achieved without a strategic plan. Since strategy refers to an overall approach, method or plan, and plan means intent or a scheme, an idea or an arranged thought; strategic plan therefore is the overall approach or method employed to facilitate efficient management of a process. It forms the bridge between where an institution is now and where it wants to be in future in the light of its analysis of the environment. Ikediugwu & Chukwumah (2015) stated that it;

analyses internal strengths and weaknesses; external opportunities and threats; generates alternative strategies; chooses from alternatives in the light of predetermined criteria; sets measurable goals and objectives; draws up implementation plans, which include action plans, people responsible and time frames and draws up evaluation criteria.

And as opined by Chang (2008),

a strategic plan is a living document that includes policy direction, implementation strategies, actions and benchmarks for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the expenditure framework which allows adjustments in areas for developments during implementation.

Ikediugwu & Chukwumah (2015) stated that strategic planning is useful to provide the institutions, stakeholders and managers with a clearer future of how a rapidly changing environment is shaping the critical decisions that their institutions face and how it is conditioning the resources that the institution is likely to have to support its decisions. Strategic planning which also has to do with ensuring that adequate resources (human and material), equipment, facilities and funds are provided; keeps the institution focused and in the opinion of Shapiro (2001), it enables one to provide answers to questions such as: who are we as an institution? What capacity do we have? What can we do as an institution? What problems are we addressing? What difference do we want to make? Which critical issues must we respond to and how? Where should we allocate our resources? What should our priority be? These could be arrived at through the four major principles of strategic planning which are:

1. planning for a strategic planning process;
2. covering the background;
3. strategic framework; and
4. internal implications.

Techniques of Strategic Planning

In adopting the tool of strategic planning in the institution, the following six steps of planning process must be adopted:

1. Step 1 – Identify problems and opportunities
2. Step 2 – Inventing and forecasting conditions
3. Step 3 – Formulating alternative plan
4. Step 4 – Evaluating alternative plan
5. Step 5 – Comparing alternative plan

6. Step 6 – Selecting a plan

SWOT analysis is a very popular strategic planning technique institutions can use to understand their internal and external environments. SWOT is the acronym for Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats. Through such an analysis the strengths and weaknesses existing within an organization can be matched with the opportunities and threats of operating in such environment so that an effective strategy can be formulated. An effective organizational strategy therefore, is one that capitalizes on the opportunities through the use of strengths and neutralizes the threats by minimizing the impact of weaknesses, to achieve pre-determined objectives.

A simple application of the SWOT analysis technique involves the following steps:

- i. Setting the objectives of the organization or its unit
- ii. Identifying its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- iii. Asking four questions which are:
 - a. How do we maximize our strength?
 - b. How do we minimize our weaknesses?
 - c. How do we capitalize on the opportunities in our external environment?
 - d. How do we protect ourselves from threats in our external environment?
- iv. Recommending the appropriate strategic plan model or theory will optimize the answers of the above four questions.

Merits of Strategic Planning

Tertiary institutions are faced with the language of scarcity of means in the eye of unlimited wants craving for attention. There are forces both internal and external determining where institutions are to go but do not care how they get there. However, effective strategic planning would help reduce wastage in the use of available resources which in turn could help achieve organisational goals. It provides consistent guidelines for institutional activities. It also helps leaders in decision making. Strategic planning helps institutions to anticipate future events through environmental analysis. The analysis provided by strategic planning gives polytechnics more of the information they need to make good decisions. Strategic planning reduces the chance of mistakes because strategies and goals are analyzed several times.

According to Learner (1999), the benefits of strategic planning in higher institutions may include the following:

1. Creating a framework for determining the direction a university should take to achieve its desired future
2. Providing a framework for competitive advantage.
3. Allowing all university constituencies to participate and work together towards accomplishing goals.
4. Raising the vision of all key participants, encouraging them to reflect creatively on the strategic direction of the university
5. Allowing dialogue between the participants, improving understanding of the organization's vision and fostering a sense of ownership of the strategic plan and belonging to the organization
6. Aiming at ways to align the university with its environment
7. Allowing the university to set priorities.

Bright and Nataraja (2019), also reiterate on the importance of strategic planning that:

Strategic planning is important for the success of higher education institutions since it allows an institution to analyze the present condition and forecast the future. Higher education institutions also should use a comprehensive strategic planning framework in order to grow and prosper in a competitive environment.

The Language of A Strategic Plan

Having conceptualized the idea, the strategic plan, there is the very significant need to document and translate it into actions and since every good plan stays dead as long as it remains in the mind of the initiator (the thinker) and to give breathe to any strategic plan as well as achieve the aspiration of the institution and make people tap into it and run with it, generation after generation, the use of language becomes a sine-qua-non. Language, according to Robert Hall in Hannah Chukwu and Ifeoma Obuasi (2009), is “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory arbitrary symbols”. They further opine that “Clark, a psychologist, says that language is a tool built for use by humans just as a pair of scissors. Just as scissors enables us to exploit our basic manipulative capacities to fulfill new ends, language enables us to exploit our basic cognitive capacities of pattern recognition and transformation in ways that reach out to new behavioral and intellectual horizons.

In all, language, as an instrument for utterances, is seen as a system of communication made up of a circumscribed set of noises resulting from unique and organized movements of specific organs found within the human body. And by this act, man is able to impart information, express feelings and emotions, influence the activities of others and comport himself with varying degrees of friendliness or hostility towards members of his speech community who are familiar with and use the same patterns of noises.

Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009) stated that language remains a significant vehicle through which information is passed from one person or group to another (from the initiators of strategic plan to those who would implement the plans and bring to light the aspiration of the institution). In the opinion of Sharndama (2015), language is one of the vital tools that politicians (policy makers and initiators of plans) use in order to shape the political (social, economic, cultural and even religious) thoughts of the electorate (the students, staff and members of the polytechnic community) with the aim of selling their ideologies (strategic plans) to them.

Language performs several functions which include informing, educating, entertaining, establishing relationship and above all, setting in motion the processes for achieving strategic plans. Simply put, language is the medium through which strategic plans actualized. Words are actions and for NBTE’s aspiration for the institution to be achieved through the beautifully designed strategic plan as usually done by one administration after another, language must be given its place of pride and used effectively to communicate the strategic plan. Consequently, the language of a strategic plan must possess certain outstanding features.

First and foremost, the language of a strategic plan must communicate effectively. It is imperative to note that the place of effective communication in achieving the aspiration of the strategic plan of the institution cannot be overemphasized. Communication refers to the act of message passing.

Implicatively, achieving the aspiration of the institutions through strategic plan is solely depended on the ability of the policy makers, and drivers of the polytechnic affairs to effectively communicate using appropriate and apt registers. Technical terms should be used but with footnotes where necessary.

The language of any strategic plan should depict questions at the preliminary stage:

1. what is to be done?
2. Who is to do it?
3. When is it to be done?
4. What is the desired goal and how it is to be achieved?

It should also provide answers to these questions at the writing stage of the strategic plan.

Secondly, the language of a strategic plan that aims to achieve the aspiration of the institution must express flexibility and must be time-bound. Flexibility in this context showcases the ability of the strategic plan to give room to modifications since the only constant feature in life is change. Change is constant and based on the ever fluctuating global environment, the language of a strategic plan must exhibit some flexibility to accommodate certain positive changes in the course of the plan since the ‘strategic’ part of the planning process is the continual attention to current changes in the organization and its external environment and how this affects the future of the organization.

Presentation of ideas must be logical. The sequence of activities must be orderly because it is vital to the success of the whole process. The activities include:

1. Assessing the external environment;
2. Assessing the internal environment;
3. Developing a vision or mission for the future;
4. Developing goals and objectives to reach that future;
5. Implementing the plan; and
6. Measuring progress and revising the plan.

Closely related to this is the fact that the language of a strategic plan must specifically state the expected duration of completion of certain tasks and assignments. This will help the institution to escape certain unforeseen changes that could hamper the actualization of the aspiration of the institution as regards its strategic plans.

The language of a strategic plan must capture local content. This implies that for any strategic plan aimed at meeting the aspiration of the institution to be achieved, designers of the plan in their use of language must be conscious of the Africanness in our society. Recall that in designing strategic plan as explicated above, attention is given to the host community and most often than not, plans are made to extend services to such communities (Baba:2018). This cannot be achieved if the language of the plan is Eurocentric, that is, estranged from and alien to the desires and demands of the host community. Consequently, the language of such strategic plan must capture the local flavour so as to carry the host community of the institution along. It should be such that captures the yearnings of the polytechnic community especially in the area of entrepreneurial trainings (Baba:2018).

The language of a strategic plan is characterised by extensive use of declarative sentences. This is because answers are provided to address all possible questions that arose at the pre-plan stage

Tenses are varied to reflect the various times. Past tense to reflect where the institution was, present tense to indicate where the institution is and future tense to place the institution in its desired future as encapsulated in the strategic plan.

Other features of the language of a strategic plan which aims at achieving the aspirations of the institution are:

1. must embrace precision (no circumlocution);
2. must be sincere and simple but not simplistic (no lie should be told)
3. must be devoid of ambiguity (no double or multiple meaning) and
4. must be practically implementable (no difficulty in implementation)
5. must forecast a definite future for the institution;
6. must embrace impersonality (no use of personal pronoun such as I, me, we, you etc.),
7. clarity (no of idioms, proverbs, or rhetorics); and
8. completeness (information must be fully gathered and nothing should be left on assumption).
9. Charts, maps, diagrams or photographs should be used where necessary.

above

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The role of language in the implementation of strategic plan in the polytechnic cannot be overemphasized. Effective use of language for communication is the panacea to achieving the aspiration of the institutions' strategic plans. Consequently, in designing strategic plan for the institution, managers of the polytechnic must give attention to the use of language which in Nigeria is the English language. The use of the various sentence structures such as simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences must be aimed at communicating effectively. Suffice to note that strategic plans in the tertiary education system over the years have met brick walls as a result of several human factors which include corruption, lack of will-power (the willingness to do the right thing), misappropriation, embezzlement, nepotism and mediocrity. Hence, for the aspiration of the institutions not to be stillborn, the strategic plan of various institutions must be jealously guided and followed to a logical implementation. Government agencies in charge of

funding the polytechnic sector must not play unhealthy politics with funds allocated for the institutions but release them promptly in order not to hamper delivery on core mandate as contained in the strategic plan. The private sector as well as non-governmental organizations, alumni associations and other philanthropists must contribute their quota (especially financially) to the actualization of the strategic plan of the institution.

Finally, while heads of the various institutions are encouraged to improve on their internally generated revenue, they are also encouraged to put modalities in place for proper and judicious management of the resources accruing to the institution.

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