

Profiling as a key success factor in modern university strategies

By Tapio Reponen

Universities are facing several challenges at the moment. Globalization, freer markets for research and education, shifting demographics meaning fewer young people in industrialized countries, diminishing public financing and students' loss of interest in studying for several years are all changing the environment radically. At the same time the quality of research is improving in many developing countries and younger people there are increasingly interested in studying in respected western universities. Consequently there are global structural changes in University markets.

Markets will become more and more fragmented in a way such that there will be global players offering their services worldwide, both through distance learning using a variety of e-learning technologies and through personal customized lecturing. There will also be smaller specialized universities to meet the demands of focused customer groups. These smaller units need cooperation, networking, joint efforts and even some ownership arrangements.

In this new environment the role and importance of strategic thinking are strengthening, as universities have to position themselves in more competitive markets. Universities need a strategy generation process of an expert organization, where a shared view of the strategic objectives and their implementation could be achieved. The viewpoint of an academic leader is the following: How should we bring about the changes that are required?

The first stage of the strategy process is to define the business we are in. Based on this definition the goals of the strategy should be specified, operationalized and made explicit to the personnel. The difficulty lies in balancing the multiple goals of the modern university environment. Meeting the strategic objectives often requires the focusing and concentration of resources and efforts. The problem is how to motivate different groups of personnel to implement actively a focused strategy of conflicting desires.

The theoretical background should be in interactive strategy generation and knowledge creation. Knowledge generation is considered a process that leads to action being taken on the part of individuals involved. Strategy planning should be an interactive learning process to create a shared vision of linking operational objectives and available resources. To illustrate this development in the following there are some thoughts on the strategy of Turku School of Economics and Baltic Sea region as one of its focus areas.

Shaping the future, Turku School of Economics (TSE) is a university of economic science specialized in the

development of business knowledge and advancement of entrepreneurial activities:

- TSE's internationally recognized research activities target business development and the knowledge that drives it.
- The university offers broad-based training in Turku and Pori. Studies include a comprehensive choice of economic sciences, other business and finance-related subjects and foreign languages.
- The broad-based activities include also continuing and adult education services, executive education, research and development services, recruiting services among others.

Turku School of Economics has three focus areas, of which one is business knowledge in global environments. Through an interactive strategy process we have concluded that Baltic Sea area is one of our key areas. We put much effort on that research and we are convinced that this definition of policy is successful. Our way of thinking got confirmation on October 1st, when we signed a three year contract to coordinate Council of the Baltic Sea States' (CBSS) EuroFaculty project.

In this framework our Pan-European Institute (PEI) is a leading unit in Finland in the study of Baltic Sea Economic Region, especially Russia. All Europeans are important collaboration partners in its operations, but PEI has an active role in promoting a wider Europe and supporting its success.

In the present economic development a natural cooperation between Baltic countries and with Russia has a lot of potential. Finland has some strength like early adoption and even pioneering use of technological innovations. We are known for our strong mobile communications industry. In a business school it is possible to combine business knowledge and technological innovations. Our role is to help in implementing new innovative operating models.

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