

# STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*Strategic Management (SM) finds wide adoption across the industry, government, military academia and other organizations with a view to ensuring survival and long-term growth. Universities across the world, especially in the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and China, have successfully implemented SM to build strong international brands and consistently maintain top global rankings. Indian Higher Education (IHE) sector, however, has not been proactive in adopting SM to address the numerous challenges that confront it. In this paper, the authors have explored the current state of SM adoption in IHE, highlighting the challenges in its implementation and suggest some ideas to help institutionalize SM for effecting long-term positive change in the sector.*

**KEYWORDS:** Strategic Management, Indian Higher Education, Implementation Challenges, Suggestions

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ADOPTION IN INDIA

Strategic Management (SM) is an established global practice for deriving competitive advantage, driving organizational excellence, building business resilience and continuity besides ensuring long-term sustenance. Strategic Management has found widespread adoption in Higher Education Institutions in the western world with leading institutions implementing Strategic Management to create unique value propositions and strengthening

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their positions at the top of the global rankings. The Indian Higher Education system which is one of the largest in the world is at an inflection point. The focus has clearly shifted from increasing Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to aspiring for excellence in all spheres despite the numerous challenges. Hence, adoption of modern management practices including Strategic Management is a logical first step in achieving this objective.

The adoption of formal strategic management by institutions of Higher Education in India is in a nascent state as compared to the western world. A survey of the top institutions of national importance indicates the stark absence of strategic management. Among the institutions of national importance, barring Indian Institute of Technology IIT Madras (<http://www.iitm.ac.in>) none of the other institutions have their strategic plans published on their website. In the private sector, which alone accounts for over 75 percent of all enrollments in higher education, none of the top 10 private institutions featuring in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF – <http://www.nirf.org>) had published Strategic Management plans on their website. In contrast, all institutions in the U.S. are required to publish their strategic plans as a mandatory pre-requisite for accreditation. The similar requirement exists for institutions in the UK. Several institutions from these countries as well as the European Union routinely dominate the yearly global rankings for higher education institutions. The survey carried out by Cotter and Paris in 2007 among member institutions of the National Consortium for Continuous Improvement (NCCI) in higher education institution of U.S., establishes a strong correlation between strategic management with other key functions in higher education institutions.

Very few researchers in India have focused on strategic management (Raghunandhan & Sequeria (2013); Pingle & Kaul (2011); Raghunandhan (2009)). The lack of literature pertaining to implementation of SM highlights the lack of awareness and emphasis on Strategic Management in Indian Higher Education as compared to institutions in developed and developing countries. Sawhney, Gupta and Kumar (2016) presented a strong case for adoption of Strategic Management by higher education institutions in India. The future success of the Indian Higher Education therefore will depend on how quickly institutions adapt to a rapidly changing environment and create strategic plans to build new capacities and capabilities to thrive.

Adopting strategic management by institutions in India seems to be logical, yet challenging. We identify the following challenges based on a survey of 350 leaders in Indian Higher Education:

- a. The current leadership is not equipped with the skill-set to envisage and implement strategic management;
- b. The culture in Indian academia lacks modern management practices, professionalism, accountability and transparency;
- c. Policy and decision-making processes in institutions have a long life-cycle being participative and consensus-based, preventing agile responsiveness;
- d. IT-adoption and automation remain poor across a clear majority of institutions;
- e. Institutions lack the autonomy needed to chart their own course;
- f. Institutions have a very narrow understanding of strategic management, limited to devising the vision, mission and focusing on operational or at best tactical issues.

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Given the huge challenges that confront Indian Higher Education, some ideas towards effective and successful implementation of strategic management at the level of individual institutions are presented below:

- a. Create a simplified strategic management framework which can be easily customized, assimilated and implemented at the institution-level;
- b. Intensive training for the leadership teams at institutions on strategic management and modern management practices should be conducted on priority;
- c. IT-adoption, especially in the areas of analytics and performance management, should be fast-tracked to ensure continuous tracking and review of progress against strategic objectives;
- d. Create financial outlays to support strategic management and invest in faculty development, research, innovation and unique student experiences;
- e. Corporatize select functional areas. Create a pool of professional managers with specialized positions such as strategic managers to drive strategy formulation and implementation;
- f. Identify mentor institutions and seek help in developing core competencies in strategic management;
- g. Create strong incentives for stakeholders in achieving strategic objectives.

At the Government/policy/regulatory levels the following initiatives are required:

- a. Formulate and articulate a National Strategic Management Framework for IHE with a buy-in from all State Governments for effective implementation;

- b. Adopt one-nation, one-policy for standardization and removal of regulatory differences across different states in the country;
- c. Let the free-market regulate;
- d. Adopt IT analytics framework to create transparency, objectivity and effectively determine institutional output and outcomes;
- e. Create centers of excellence in strategic management in institutions of national importance which extend help to other institutions backed by solid research and demonstrated best-practices;
- f. Make adoption of strategic management by institutions a core element of the accreditation process;
- g. Introduce certifications and world-class training programs on strategic management for institution leaders and senior functionaries;

## CONCLUSION

Research, case studies and empirical evidence establish a strong correlation between Strategic Management and organizational excellence. Internationally, institutions of higher education have strongly ingrained strategic management practices and processes. We strongly advocate the adoption of strategic management by the Indian Higher Education sector to overcome the critical challenges confronting it today. We believe that the adoption of Strategic Management by Indian Higher Education shall help drive vision, create institutional focus, achieve operational efficiencies, improve performance, enhance the student experience and impact long-term outcomes, ensuring global competitiveness and sustainability.

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