Chapter 15
Quality Assurance and Institutional Research for University Strategic Management:
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Strategic management in higher education (HE) has become data-reliant. Most higher education institutions (HEIs) all over the world have implemented quality assurance (QA) and institutional research (IR) with the purpose of generating data that that would assist in evidence-based decision making for better strategic management. However, data generated through QA and IR processes have to be integrated and streamlined in order to successfully inform strategic management. One of the challenges facing higher education institutions is to integrate the data generated by QA and IR processes effectively. This chapter examines examples of good practice for integrating the data generated by these processes for use as tools to inform strategic management, using the University of Namibia as a reference point. The chapter offers suggestions on how higher education institutions may be assisted to overcome challenges when integrating the outcomes of QA and IR processes in order to close the quality loop through effective strategic management.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) should contribute to the development and support of economic, social and cultural progress of any given country in the world (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). In order to make a meaningful contribution, HEIs have to respond to the demands of changing and evolving societal conditions, and have to develop the internal structures required to accomplish their vision (Kahveci & Taskin, 2013). These conditions produce challenges for HEIs which include a mixed profile in the student population as a result of massification, the emergence of new competitors, globalisation and internationalisation, a knowledge-based economy, a technology-driven society, new horizons in education, and increasing external demands for accountability and transparency (Kahveci & Taskin, 2013). Addressing these changes and challenges has meant finding ways to align organisational capacities with environmental demands and opportunities, as well as immense responsibilities for governance and management at institutional level. However, higher education (HE) systems and institutions are being faced with an unprecedented number of challenges, which call for new and innovative approaches to educational planning and decision-making. Strategic management has, accordingly, been widely acknowledged as a tool that can help to prepare HEIs to face these emerging challenges.

Quality assurance (QA) and institutional research (IR) can be inherently embedded in all a university's practices to achieve the strategic goals effectively (Weeks-Kaye, 2004). Quality assurance is a holistic approach which covers all processes in a HEI. The success of a QA system depends on the support of management, hence, QA should also cover strategic management, which is a primary responsibility of senior leadership (Kahveci, Uygun, Yurtsever, & Ilyas, 2012). Through QA an institution aims to assure an agreed standard for all activities, not only through established procedures and processes but also through a commitment to understanding and attempting to meet the expectations of students and others. Quality improvement adds a further step, with a commitment to continuous and proactive improvement in academic programmes and services.

In addition to Internal Quality Assurance (IQA,) many HEIs all over the world have introduced IR. Such IR has become central for integration in the QA system to support the strategic management process. However, compared to IR, formal QA systems in HE are a fairly new phenomenon (Geyser & Murdoch, 2016). According to the Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR), IR refers to research that is designed to generate information that serves planning, policy development, resource allocation, and management or evaluation decisions in all functional areas (SAAIR, 2019). Klemenčič and Brennan (2013) define IR as research conducted within an HEI to provide information which supports institutional planning, policy formation and decision making. IR is not merely conducted for the advancement of knowledge about higher education in general but is also applied research directed by specific planning, policy or decision situations.

It is clear that QA and IR play a complementary role, both generating data intended to inform external stakeholders regarding the accountability and institutional strategic management of quality enhancement (QE). However, according to Geyser and Murdoch (2016), the relationship between the QA and IR in informing institutional strategic management has not been clearly articulated. Therefore, collaboration and integration of the use of such data appears to be unclear. In this chapter, using the University of Namibia (UNAM) as a case study, the authors conduct a critical literature analysis to explore the challenges faced by HEIs in integrating QA and IR processes to effectively inform evidence-based decision

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