THE DEGREE OF POSSESSING STRATEGIC PLANNING SKILLS AMONG ACADEMIC LEADERSHIPS AT THE JORDANIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This study aims at identifying the degree of strategic planning skills among academic leaders at Jordanian private universities. To achieve the objective of the study, a questionnaire is developed, and its validity and reliability is checked. The sample of the study consists of 150 subjects, who are selected using random stratified sample from Jordanian private universities (Jerash, Irbid, Philadelphia, Zarqa', Isra' and Zaitounah). On conducting statistical analysis, results showed that the degree of strategic planning skills among academic leaders at private Jordanian universities is moderate in general, high for the vision and purposes domains, and moderate for values and procedural plans and environment analysis (SWOT analysis). The study provided a set of recommendations including providing training courses in strategic planning and conducting assessment studies for the strategic plans.

Keywords: Strategic Planning Skills, Academic Leaderships, Universities

Introduction

Strategic planning is a feature of advanced organizations that as a work method in order to possess pioneering or following pioneering organizations. Universities, such as other organizations, seeks excellence and competes in order to achieve good reputation related to instruction, scientific research, community service, which made universities aware of the importance of strategic planning as an effective tool for development and improvement.

Strategic planning is not just a guarantee for the organization to sustain its financial position or supplying it with the ability to sustain its reserves, because it is a systematic process that involves several stages and steps through which the current position of the organization and analyzing its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats it encounters, identifying its vision and aims, choosing the strategic alternatives which achieve the objective effectively within the surrounding environmental conditions, setting the strategic general plan as well as the strategies related to different functional areas and preparing the cultural environment of the organization, preparing administrative leaders and improving communications and providing information necessary for making better decisions, and setting executive plans and schedules as well as monitoring, follow-up and assessment of the performance (Farrah et al. 2001). Hussy (Hussy, 1982, p3) suggests that strategic planning is "*an essential part of management, and a vital element because it shows the awareness of future, and preparing the requirements for dealing with it*".

Kolter and Murphy (1981) consider strategic planning as the basis for the development and reforming the strategic consistence between the educational organization and the changing market opportunities. They also suggest that its main objective is the development of educational organization performance, so that it can survive in the face of the surrounding environmental conditions.

Due to global variables, the need of education for strategic planning calls for responding to challenges that face education, including changes in population and scientific and technological development, and increasing demand for education and its rising costs. Strategic planning improves conditions, and recruits better instructors, and attracting excellent students and modernizing facilities and equipments, as well as acquiring financial resources necessary for the achievement of goals (Dooris et al. 2004).

Strategic planning is defined as the development and setting long-term plans for the objectives of effective interaction with opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses related to the resources of the organization. It also includes setting achievable goals, and setting the general policy of the organization (Hunger & Wheelen 1997). It is also defined as the systematic effort for making essential decisions and taking major actions that defines certain organization (Bryson 2003). Whilst McFarland (1979) defines it as a systematic intellectual process through which best means are selected for the achievement of certain goals related to predicting of the future. Another definition of strategic planning is the decisions and organized actions based on previous data related to internal and external

environments. It is also defined as the organized effort targeting making essential decisions (Wheelen and Hunger 2006).

Brayson (1995) suggests that the main elements of strategic planning include: identifying organizational trends; forming broad and general policies as well as strategic goals; conducting internal and external assessment of the environment; drawing attention to the needs of the organization members; forming strategies appropriate for dealing with the strategic topics; seeking support for the strategies; and making decisions and assessing the results of execution.

Bean (1993) identified the challenges related to strategic planning and plans, which are: thinking that success is continuous and will be repeated, so that there is no need for better work; and ignoring the culture of the organization and developing strong work conditions based on weak organizational culture.

Jordan followed other countries in adopting the policy of strategic planning in higher education, and the King Hussein's fund for excellence, in cooperation with a group of consultants from the "Centre of Quality Assurance in International Education" held workshops for training (on how to prepare strategic plans for universities) in which 18 universities participated (Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence, 2007).

In response to the governmental directions concerning the necessity of setting a comprehensive strategic plan for the development of higher education sector and scientific research for the years (2007-2012); a conference was held in 13/5/2007, in which agreement on general guidelines was reached, as well as the main components desired for higher education in Jordan. This is to achieve a high-quality education which is capable of preparing qualified people to satisfy the needs of the community. Therefore, a national team is established for setting the required national strategy to be a reference that higher education organizations (institutions) commit their selves to (Ministry of higher education and scientific research, 2007).

The ministry of higher education and scientific research held a workshop for universities under the title of "*Strategic planning for higher education institutions*" in the 1st and 2nd of December 2007, with the objective of training experts at Jordanian universities on setting strategic plans for their universities.

The Jordanian private universities are an essential component of the higher education. There are 20 private universities in Jordan, 10 public universities, and 2 regional universities. Private universities were pioneering in participating in the Hussein's fund course in the

domain of strategic planning, and in responding to the directions of the ministry of higher education concerning setting strategic plans. The question which arises here is:

Did the efforts which were exercised in Jordan, in term of strategic planning, enable the academic leaders of possessing the skills of strategic planning? And did these leaders acquire those skills?

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

The problem of the study is related to identifying the degree of acquisition of strategic planning skills among the academic leaders. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following question:

What is the degree of acquisition of strategic planning skills among the academic leaders from their point of view?

Significance of the study

This study may benefit the leaders at the ministry of higher education and scientific research, and the board for the accreditation of higher education institutions in Jordan. This can be achieved through the feedback provided in this study about the possession of strategic planning skills among the academic leaders, and consequently taking the necessary steps for developing that degree. Additionally, leaders and decision makers at private universities may benefit due to the fact that strategic planning is an appropriate tools for planning.

Procedural Definitions

Degree of possession: is the degree of mastery of strategic planning skills among academic leaders at Jordanian private universities. It is identified based on the study subjects' responses to the questionnaire.

Skills: is the ability of the academic leaders at preparing a strategic plan, which includes: vision, mission, aims, objectives, procedural plans, and analysis of the environment. Hence, it helps them in doing their work.

Academic leaders: are the deans and heads of departments who are responsible for achieving the goals of the university with the participation of the employees.

Strategic planning: is the method of thinking and working that is based on certain skills in the following domains: vision, mission, goals, values, procedural plans, and analysis of the environment. This is to solve problems that encounter the academic administrations at

the Jordanian universities and, identifying and investing the opportunities of available resources due to the restrictions and imposed threats.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study are as follows:

- *Special limitations*: the study is limited to the Jordanian private universities (Jerash, Irbid, Philadelphia, Zarqa', Isra', Zaitounah).

- *Human resources limitations*: the study is limited to the deans of colleges (faculties) and the heads of academic departments at the six Jordanian private universities mentioned above.

- *Temporal limitations*: the study is limited to the academic session (year) 2011-2012.

Literature Review

Al-Harithy (2006) conducted a study which aimed at revealing the degree of availability of strategic planning indexes at the female colleges in Saudi universities. Data were collected through a questionnaire which was distributed on the respondents (sample size, $n = 215$) including deans, heads of departments, and lecturers. The findings of the study showed that the degree of strategic planning indexes availability at females' colleges was moderate in terms of future vision, values, and strategic objectives.

The study of Al-Dajny (2006) aimed at identifying the reality of strategic planning at the Islamic University in Gaza by analyzing the strategic plan under the Quality standards approved by the national board of Quality and Accreditation. Data were collected via a questionnaire. Sample of the study consisted of 117 subjects. Results of the study showed the clarity of the strategic planning concept among the administrations of the university, where 89.75% of the study population conduct strategic planning. Results also showed the weakness of expressing some aspects of the vision and objectives.

Bawady (2008) conducted a study which aimed at analyzing the internal environment of Hadramout's university and the components of strategic planning there in. This is to reveal the weaknesses and strengths in the components of organizational environment of the university, and the components of the strategic planning at the university. Data were collected using a questionnaire which was sent to the subjects of the study ($n = 114$). Findings of the study revealed the agreement among the members of population of the study on the weakness of the internal environment components and the components of strategic planning at the

university. In addition, the university is not yet qualified for the adoption of the strategic method to overcome the obstacles it encounters.

Research Methodology

The descriptive analysis method is used for identifying the degree of possessing strategic planning skills among the academic leaderships at the Jordanian private universities.

Population of the study

Population of the study consists of all academic administrations at private universities in Jordan, whose number is 280 college deans and heads of departments at the Jordanian private universities.

Sample of the study

The sample of the study consists of 120 academic leaders, who are selected using random stratified sample from the academic administrations at the Jordanian private universities (Jerash University, Irbid University, Philadelphia University, Zarqa' University, Isra' University and Zaitounah University) for the academic session (year) 2011-2012.

Instrument of the study

A questionnaire is developed through reviewing theoretical literature and the revision of previous studies that addressed the strategic planning, such as the studies of Al-Harithy (2006), Al-Dajny (2006) and Badawi (2008). The questionnaire includes 42 items under the following dimensions: vision and missions, objectives, values, procedural plans, environmental analysis / SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To check the validity of the instrument, Content Validity is developed. Meanwhile, to check the reliability, it is calculated through test-re-test method and using Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.90$).

Procedures of the study

After checking the validity and reliability of the study, selecting the study sample, and having the required approval to conduct the study, 150 questionnaire were sent to the subjects from the academic leaders at the Jordanian private universities, and 120 questionnaires were returned (120 responses). To identify the degree of possession, means were calculated as

follows: means ranging between 1 and 2.33 indicate a low degree of strategic planning possession, whilst means equals to or greater than 3.68 (3.68) indicate a high degree of possession.

Statistical processing

In order to answer the question of the study, means and standard deviations (*Std.*) are used.

Results and Discussion

The results related to the question of the study and their discussion is illustrated as follows:

What is the degree of acquisition of strategic planning skills among the academic leaders from their point of view?

In order to answer this question, means and standard deviations are calculated for each of the strategic planning skills dimensions, and for the instrument as a whole. Table 1 shows the order of those dimensions based on the mean values.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the degree of possessing strategic planning skills among leaders at the Jordanian private universities from their point of view, which are ranked from top to bottom based on their mean values.

Number	Dimension	*Mean*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
1	Vision and Mission	3.77	1.09	1	High
2	Goals	3.71	0.98	2	High
3	Values	3.46	1.25	3	Medium
4	Procedural plans	3.39	1.26	4	Medium
5	Environmental analysis / SWOT	3.14	1.51	5	Medium
	The Instrument as a whole	3.46	1.18		

Table 1 shows that mean values range between 3.14-3.77, and all are medium, except the dimension of Vision and Mission and purposes (goals).

Vision and Mission ranked first with the highest mean value of (3.77), followed by Goals in the second rank with a mean value of (3.71). Goals is followed by the mean value of Values (mean = 3.46), then by Procedural plans in the fourth rank with the value of (mean = 3.39), and SWOT analysis came last with a mean value of (3.14). The mean value of the Instrument as a whole is (3.46).

Vision and Mission as a dimension is ranked first with the highest means value (3.77), which may be due to the desire among academic leaders to improve work during their administration, that they try to modernize and find ideas that help in developing and improving the work, and to make it better. It may also be due to the effect of the application of Quality standards at educational institutions, which requires a vision and mission for the university, the college and the department.

Concerning the analysis of the environment which is ranked last with a mean value of (3.14), it may be due to the shortage in training courses, through which the skills of internal and external environment analyses may be acquired. This skill requires a lot of time and effort, which may be not available to the academician due to his/her burdens. Additionally, the technique of administrative analysis needs experience and a lot of knowledge in this field, because of the various factors affecting it.

Results showed also that the degree of strategic planning skills possession among academic leaders as a whole is medium with a mean value of (3.46). These findings are consistent with the results in the study of Al-Harithy (2006), in which the degree of strategic planning indexes availability (vision, mission, goals, strategic goals and values) was moderate.

Mean and standard deviation values for the subjects' estimates for the items of each domain alone are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the items of the instrument's domains from top to bottom based on the means.

Domain of Vision and Mission					
Domain no.	Items	*Means*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
1	I possess the skill of clarifying the scope of work at present in the future	3.84	1.16	1	High
2	I possess the skill of involving those concerned with forming the mission	3.82	1.20	2	High
3	I possess the skill of forming a clear vision for my place of work	3.75	1.13	3	High
4	I possess the skill of forming a	3.70	1.16	4	High

	mission that reflects the available abilities				
5	I possess the skill of involving those concerned with forming the vision	3.68	1.18	5	High
Domain of Goals					
Domain no.	Items	*Means*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
6	I possess the skill of employing the capacities of work in a way that enables achieving the goals	3.84	1.15	1	High
7	I possess the skill of specifying goals based on available recources	3.79	1.07	2	High
8	I possess the skill of distinguishing between goals and purposes	3.78	1.00	3	High
9	I possess the skill of identifying the means which achieves the main purpose	3.76	2.49	4	High
10	I possess the skill of setting measurable skills	3.72	1.06	5	High
11	I possess the skill of setting clear goals to manage human resources at work	3.70	1.00	6	High
12	I possess the skill of identifying plans that achieve the goals	3.66	1.09	7	Medium
13	I possess the skill of connecting the available resources to desired goals	3.62	1.11	8	Medium
14	I possess the skill of applying results of scientific research in order to develop goals	3.61	1.09	9	Medium
Domain of Values					
Domain no.	Items	*Means*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
15	I possess the skill of encouraging communications among employees	3.72	1.39	1	High

	at work				
16	I possess the skill of developing commitment to the goals of work	3.71	1.35	2	High
17	I possess the skill of transparency in assessing employee	3.68	1.44	3	High
18	I possess the skill of clear understanding of the responsibilities required for performing the required mission	3.44	1.47	4	Medium
19	I possess the skill of accountability	3.40	1.4	5	Medium
20	I possess the skill of founding an organizational culture that helps achieving the goals	3.38	1.26	6	Medium
21	I possess the skill of providing an environment that is appropriate for creativity	3.38	1.39	7	Medium
22	I possess the skill of distinguishing between practiced and desired value	3.32	1.21	8	Medium
23	I possess the skill of founding a clear system for incentives	3.30	1.30	9	Medium
Domain of Procedural plans					
Domain no.	Items	*Means*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
24	I possess the skill of monitoring the progress of work according to plan	3.58	1.31	1	Medium
25	I possess the skill of classifying plans based on their type	3.52	1.31	2	Medium
26	I possess the skill of setting a schedule for the strategic plan	3.39	1.34	3	Medium
27	I possess the skill of identifying the executive procedures followed in achieving the goals of the department	3.37	1.38	4	Medium
28	I possess the skill of identifying the	3.35	1.44	5	Medium

	party responsible for execution				
29	I possess the skill of identifying the budget based on the domain of the plan	3.28	1.37	6	Medium
30	I possess the skill of setting specific standards for measuring the performance	3.25	1.3	7	Medium
SWOT analysis					
Domain no.	Items	*Means*	*Std.*	Rank	Degree
31	I possess the skill of diagnosing the points of strengths	3.45	1.52	1	Medium
32	I possess the skill of diagnosing the points of weaknesses	3.44	1.55	2	Medium
33	I possess the skill of diagnosing the available opportunities	3.26	1.51	3	Medium
34	I possess the skill of diagnosing the threats	3.24	1.54	4	Medium
35	I possess the skill of identifying the external factors affecting the work	3.14	1.67	5	Medium
36	I possess the skill of identifying the internal factors affecting the work	3.11	1.01	6	Medium
37		3.11	1.65	7	Medium
38	I possess the skill of identifying the resources to be developed	3.06	1.59	8	Medium
39	I possess the skill of classifying strategic topics according to their levels (internal strength, internal weakness, external opportunities and external threats)	3.03	1.64	9	Medium
40	I possess the skill of arriving at common expectations shared with the department's employees based on the demands of the department	3.02	1.59	10	Medium

	and the labor market				
41	I possess the skill of acquiring knowledge of strategic topics affecting the ability of the department to achieve its goals	3.02	1.62	11	Medium
42	I possess the skill of controlling the external environment (governmental policies and economic conditions)	2.62	1.50	12	Medium

The results related to the domain of vision and mission showed that the mean values for the items of this domain range between (3.68-3.84), all within high degrees. The item (I possess the skill of clearing the scope of work at present and in the future) has the highest mean value (3.84) followed by the item (I possess the skill of involving those concerned with forming the mission) with a mean of (3.82), which may be ascribed to the desire of academic leaders to ensure progress at work. This is consistent with the result in the study of Al-Dajny (2006). The item which states (I possess the skill of involving those concerned with forming the vision) has the lowest mean value (3.68), which may be due to the difficulty of unifying the perspectives of employees on a single future vision.

In the domain of goals, results indicate that the means for the items range between (3.61-3.84) while most of them are within the high degree. The item (I possess the skill of employing the abilities of work in a way that helps in achieving the goals) has the highest mean (3.84), followed by the item (I possess the skill of identifying goals according to the available resources) with a mean (3.79), which may be due to the academic leaders' awareness that the achievement of goals within the available resources is the first step towards achieving the future vision of the department. This result is consistent with the study of Al-Dajny (2006). The item (I possess the skill of applying the result of scientific research in developing goals) came last with a mean of (3.61), which may be due to the lack of scientific research related to planning and needs as well as the lack of knowledge among academic leaders of the shortage of financial and human resources required for the scientific research.

Concerning the domain of values, the results indicate that the mean values of its item range between (3.30-3.72), most of the means are within the medium degree. The item (I

possess the skill of encouraging communications among employees at work) has the highest mean (3.72), followed by the item (I possess the skill of developing the commitment to the goals) with a mean of (3.71), which can be ascribed to the belief held by academic leaders that the communication between co-workers creates a sense of familiarity which helps to find an organizational atmosphere that contributes to the exchange of ideas useful for work. The item (I possess the skill of founding a clear system for incentives) has the lowest mean resources allocated to motivate employees at universities, and the lack of authority to give financial incentives by academic leaders. This result is consistent with the study of Al-Harithy (2006).

In terms of procedural plans, results indicate that the means for its items range between (3.25-3.58), all are medium in degree. The item (I possess the skill of monitoring the progress of work according to the plan) has the highest mean (3.58), followed by the item (I possess the skill of classifying plans based on their types) with a mean of (3.52), which may be due to the clarity of the plan's goals among academic leaders; it contributes to monitoring their progress according to the schedule. Additionally, the nature of their work it requires a sufficient knowledge of the plans and their types. The item (I possess the skill of setting specific standards for measuring performance) has the lowest mean (3.25), which can be ascribed to the difficulty of applying a single standard for judging all employees, because each one has his/her own conditions which ought to be taken into account when judging him/her.

In terms of SWOT analysis, the results indicate that the means of its items range between (2.62-3.45), all are moderate/medium. Items (I possess the skill of diagnosing the points of strengths) and (I possess the skill of diagnosing the points of weaknesses) with the means of (3.45) and (3.44), respectively. This may be due to the long years of experience through which he/she acquired knowledge of points strength and weakness. It can also be ascribed to the abilities of the academic leader which are acquired through the training courses he/she has. The item (I possess the skill of controlling the external environment (governmental policies and economic conditions)) has the lowest mean (2.62), followed by (I possess the skill of acquiring the knowledge related to strategic issues that affect the ability of the department to achieve its goals) with a mean (3.02). This may be ascribed to the rapid changes which make it difficult to follow and eliminate their effects. It can be due to the difficulty of controlling the conditions surrounding the work. This is due to the various parties affecting the external environment.

Recommendations of the study

Based on the results of the study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. Establishing a unit that specializes strategic planning at the directorate of quality in Jordanian private universities.

2. Holding training courses for the academic leaders at the Jordanian private universities for the purpose of developing the skills of strategic planning among them.

3. Conducting assessment studies that assess strategic plans at the Jordanian private universities.

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