

Strategic Plan: Internalizing Quality Culture-A Case Study of SBSSS, CHRIST (Deemed to be University)

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Abstract

CHRIST (Deemed to be University) initiated a novel concept of developing a five-year projection for the strategies to be deployed and targets to be achieved by each School/Department under the seven criteria laid down by NAAC. The Strategic Plan was made in 2017-18 by each School/Department through a democratic process with the involvement of almost all existing faculty. In the School of Business Studies and Social Sciences (SBSSS), the implementation of the Plan is overseen by a team of faculty members whose role include periodic reiteration of the projections and targets, motivating faculty to achieve the same, collating data for internal audit, presenting audit results and working out the road map to overcome shortcomings therein. The continuous review of targets coupled with motivation and constructive follow-up has resulted in a fair success particularly in areas of Curriculum Design and Development, Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Consultancy and most importantly, Student Support. Some lacunae remain in other areas and efforts are underway to bridge the gaps.

This paper elucidates the endeavours at SBSSS to internalize the culture of quality among the faculty through the implementation of the strategic plan and bring out the results therein.

Keywords: Strategic plan, quality culture, institutional performance criteria

INTRODUCTION

Management initiatives and governance in educational institutions can go a long way in internalizing as well as realizing quality in various performance indicators. External accrediting agencies set performance indicators to assess and accredit higher educational institutions. To attain these standards, institutions may adopt one of two

approaches- a compliance driven approach or one wherein they align their internal working and approaches to improve their processes and thereby attaining the performance standards (Shah, 2011). Adoption of just the former may not be very sustainable in terms of long term improvement in academic quality.

The School of Business Studies and Social Sciences (SBSSS), an interdisciplinary unit and campus of CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru adopted a combination of these two approaches. The School offers undergraduate and post graduate programmes in management and social science streams. The University had initiated the identification of mega trends and formulation of a strategic plan by each School/Department of the University for the period 2018-23. In the SBSSS, it was followed up with the constitution of a team, the Strategic Plan Implementation Team, to oversee the compliance of the targets by adopting various quality initiatives and internalizing the same. There were some hits, a few misses. This paper brings out the endeavours of the Strategic Plan Implementation Team to create an institutional culture of internalizing quality in the pursuit of performance targets. It documents the efforts to secure improved outcomes through strategic planning and internal review.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The survival of higher education institutions in the long run requisites a strong emphasis on planning. Institutions will be compelled to be introspective and analytical to undertake long term ranging planning (Kotler et al, 1981). The changing external and internal environment such as decreasing financial support from the State, rapid technological advances changing demographics and outdated academic programmes have challenged universities to adopt innovative models and strategic planning to reorient and adjust to the new circumstances (Hassanien, 2017). Effectiveness evaluations have indicated stronger results when the combined university governance and management initiatives are made in right earnest along with external quality audit (Carr et al, 2005) . The effective strategy implementation, external quality audits, and internal reviews and improvement processes, if effectively managed, could improve performance of the university on various educational measures (Shah, 2011)

STRATEGIC PLAN FORMULATION

Strategy development and implementation is practiced in most universities across the globe. However, in India, barring a few higher educational institutions, it is rarely followed. A strategic plan provides a direction for the University to attain its vision and mission. At CHRIST the formulation of the Academic Strategic Plan 2018-23 was initiated through a bottom up and participative approach at a time when the University was approaching its golden jubilee year. The foreword by the then Vice Chancellor, Fr. Thomas C Mathew in the document mentions that the plan, rather than a perspective plan is a dynamic one, open to continuous revisions given the changing environment in academia in the modern world. He however, iterates that the plan provides a direction to excel in education, research and innovation, in line with the

University's vision and mission.

The modus operandi for the formulation of the Academic Strategic Plan 2018-23 was one which involved the participation of every faculty. Each School/Department of the University was provided the outline for making the plan. Six performance indicators (PI) were identified in the outline provided-Curriculum design and development; Teaching-learning and evaluation; Research and publications; Learning resources; Student support and institutional values and social responsibility. Within each performance indicator, 5-6 initiatives were indicated. The goals, the action plan and the persons responsible for enabling and attaining each initiative, were to be provided by each department/School. The strategic plan was finalized at the annual two day outbound training (OBT) of that year.

The faculty members, within their department/School deliberated on the initiatives within each PI as well as the quantitative targets to be achieved. For instance, one initiative under the Curriculum design and development PI was- 'Introduction of new courses/programmes in emerging areas'. Accordingly, the emerging areas were identified; a target of say introducing 10 new courses and 1 new program over a period of five years, the plan period, was set. The Strategic Plan document and the mega trends identified were provided to all teaching faculty in the form of a book rather than a PDF so as to enable reiteration of the University vision and the self-declared targets. The Strategic Plan document of SBSSS pertaining to Criteria I- Curriculum Design and Development is shown in Annexure 1.

Strategic Plan Implementation Team at SBSSS

A Strategic Plan Implementation Team was constituted to oversee the implementation of the plan, ensure periodic reiteration of the projections and targets, motivate faculty to achieve the same through conduct of special training sessions, collate data for internal audit, present audit results and draw the road map to overcome shortcomings therein. In the two years since its constitution, the Team has been endeavoring to internalize a quality culture in SBSSS while performing its role.

"Managers who inundate their teams with the same messages, over and over, via multiple media, need not feel bad about their persistence. In fact, this redundant communication works to get projects completed quickly"(Neeley, 2011). The Team reiterates the goals set for each PI whenever an opportunity finds itself. The teaching faculty members of the School meet every Monday and a few minutes in most meetings are set aside for bringing out some or the other aspect of the Strategic Plan depending upon the time period of the semester. In the first two to three meetings, suggestions for adopting innovative evaluation techniques and their incorporation in the course plan are discussed. Conduct of orientation and bridge courses are mandated to ensure support to the newly enrolled students and enhance their capability. The importance of monitoring student performance in the internal and external assessments is always deliberated in the post mid semester examination period. During the later part of the term, the need to introduce new courses in emerging areas

is brought out around the time that the Board of Studies meetings are scheduled.

A special session to discuss the following was conducted during the outbound training programme in the current academic year. The following questions were raised:

What was the thought process behind making the strategic plan? Is it being carried out in right earnest? Are the quality of the activities/ programmes in sync with than planned? Is it becoming a tedious? How can we rewire ourselves to enjoy the process? How far away are we from getting there? Do we need a nudge? The session was a time for reflection and renewal of commitment towards attaining of the goals set in the Plan. Strong leaders know the value of R & R (reflection and renewal). They periodically pull themselves and their teams back from daily work in operations to work on themselves (Folkman,2011).

One of the best ways to motivate faculty to achieve targets are by sharing the achievements/ experiences of other faculty. The innovative teaching methods adopted are collated from the faculty through Google Sheets visible to all, thereby providing an opportunity for newer faculty to emulate these practices. It can also make faculty think of initiating an innovative practice in the next term. To encourage publication in quality journals, self declaration of proposed papers that they will author along with the journals that they are hoping to publish in are secured. A follow up of the same is made to check progress.

Several efforts were made to boost the consultancy the revenue generated from the same. Capacity building programmes to set up consultancy were organized as proposed in the Strategic Plan document. Opportunity was harnessed when the Head of an NGO was invited to speak to the students and she proposed the possibility of setting up a consultancy cell at SBSSS and one of the faculty here should head the same. Efforts to fructify the proposal were catalyzed by the concerned persons and the Cell was set up.

A participatory approach in impact evaluation by involving the stakeholders is a very effective way of securing the outcome of the project itself (UNICEF, 2012). The Team uses this approach for collating information while presenting itself for the annual academic audit. The audit instrument is explained to all the staff members and the information is sought and secured through a workshop where each of the Clusters feed in the relevant data during the workshop. The PDF of the final report is circulated among the faculty before submitting to the relevant authorities. The biggest advantage of this approach is that all faculty are familiarized with the quality parameters and activities at the School.

Once the internal academic audit is conducted and the results of the same are informed, the same is shared with all faculty members of the School. A meeting is held to discuss in a threadbare manner the strengths, weaknesses and the areas that require serious attention. Strategies to strengthen the strengths and weaken the weaknesses in other words a road map towards improvement were identified and agreed upon through a participative approach.

Some of the strengths, weaknesses and areas requiring serious attention for four of the six parameters are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Audit Results and Action Plan for Improvement

Performance Indicator	Strengths	Weaknesses	Areas that require serious concern	Action Plan for Improvement
Curriculum Design and Development	Incorporation of Gender Equity, Human values & Professional Ethics	Courses for employment and entrepreneurship	----	Better representation of facts Syllabus should include terms like 'to make students more employable' etc in the objectives
Teaching Learning and Evaluation	Assessment of learning needs of the First-Year students.	Mentor-Student ratio	Number of applications for revaluation leading to change in marks	Uniformity in the concept of mentoring through a structured format. Only class teachers are mentors –to improve ratio, all teachers should be mentors. Orientation on assessment for all faculty and special orientation for newly joined faculty. Synoptic Answers and marking scheme to reduce scope for subjectivity.

Research and Publications	Workshops & Seminars conducted Code of Ethics for malpractice	International Fellowship for research.	Research funds – Government Agencies Research papers	Research committee- Identifies funding agencies and sends emails with format and reminder for deadline for application etc. Research mentor, Sessions by international faculty/researchers, Commitment to publish one paper in a Scopus indexed journal Option to UG/PG students to publish papers with the supervising faculty instead of dissertation
Student Support	Capacity enhancement and development schemes	Percentage of placement	Contribution made by department alumni.	Member of BOS; Invited as Judge for Events; Talk on Career Options; Knowledge Sharing

Outcome

The efforts towards internalizing quality culture and simultaneously aiming at attaining the targets set in the Plan have been difficult and tumultuous. There have been a few aspects of the PI where we have succeeded as is evident from Table 2.

In the Curriculum Design and Development it is noticed that a 2-3 new courses are introduced by every cluster (06 clusters in the SBSSS). Thus the target of 10 new courses over the 5-year period will certainly be attained. Continuous revision of syllabi to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and other skills has been undertaken. A new Skill Development Programme was introduced to enable the enhancement of analytical ability and critical thinking. Efforts to internationalise the

curriculum are underway. Further efforts are needed to attract more foreign students.

Teaching, Learning and Evaluation is the second PI and in this several benefits have been reaped. Several faculty have been using innovative methods of teaching and evaluation. At least 15 of the faculty got the students to set up an exhibition to bring out a specific aspect of the course/topic. For instance, the faculty teaching Gender Histories brought out the concept through a gender carnival. Others used the workshop/simulation methods. A case in point is the workshop for filing tax returns wherein the students actually filed the tax returns of some other faculty; in yet another instance, the faculty conducted a simulated exercise to explain the entire election process, right from filing of nomination to campaigning to casing a vote! Similarly, there were several innovative evaluation methods adopted too. A particular aspect worth bringing out is that every cluster is considering introducing at least one submission paper as a form of evaluation. Finally on account of the efforts to improve the evaluation process, revaluation applications came down from 180 to 106 in the first Semester of 2019-20 as compared to the previous semester.

As far as the research and publications PI is concerned, a noteworthy achievement was in the field of consultancy. As mentioned earlier, several capacity building programmes to enable provision of consultancy to industry were undertaken. The same along with the utilizing opportunity when it knocked, has culminated in the setting up an academic and research consultancy cell in the campus. The unit monitors, surveys the labour market conditions in various sectors, identifies potential opportunities for CSR and conducts impact evaluation for various training programmes conducted by the partner NGO.

While some achievements have been secured, there are some lacunae. The research output is not satisfactory despite the efforts made by both the Team as well as the Research Committee. Self declared targets to publish in quality journals have resulted in an improvement in the number of publications, but the targets as per the Plan is a distance away. So also in the case of research projects. Further efforts are needed to secure the targets set in the Plan in this PI.

CONCLUSION

The continuous review of targets coupled with motivation and constructive follow-up has resulted in a fair success particularly in areas of Curriculum Design and Development, Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Consultancy and most importantly, Student Support. Some lacunae remain in other areas and efforts are underway to bridge the gaps. A more subtle approach to internalize quality improvements in each PI have been adopted, enabling the achievement of the Plan targets. The combination of a compliance driven approach along with one where there has been an alignment of the working processes in such a way as to internalize quality to attaining the performance standards has met with a fair success.

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ANNEXURE 1**Strategic Plan of SBSSS****Criteria I: Curriculum Design and development****Initiatives****1. Introduction of new courses/ programs in emerging area****Action Plan:**

Introduce new programs and courses

Goal:

1 new program, 10 new courses

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
2 new courses per program	2 new courses per program	2 new courses 1 new program	2 new courses per program	2 new courses per program

Person Responsible:

XYZ

2. Revision of Syllabus to enhance employability entrepreneurship research skill and development

Action Plan

Revision of syllabus to include new skills and knowledge

Goals:

50% revision of syllabus

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
10% revision of syllabus	10% revision of syllabus	10% revision of syllabus	10% revision of syllabus	10% revision of syllabus

Person Responsible:

XYZ

3. Introduction of CBCS/Elective courses in the program

Action Plan:

Introduction of new electives in emerging areas

Goals:

10 new electives

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
2 new electives per program	2 new electives per program	2 new electives per program	2 new electives per program	2 new electives per program

Person Responsible:

XYZ

4. Incorporation of Gender, Environment sustainability, human values and professional ethics into curriculum

Action Plan:

Enriching curriculum by incorporating gender environmental and ethical values

Goals

5% incorporation in curriculum

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
10% incorporation in curriculum	10% incorporation in curriculum	10% incorporation in curriculum	10% incorporation in curriculum	10% incorporation in curriculum

Person Responsible:

XYZ

5. Inclusion of Student projects in the curriculum

Action Plan:

Enhance curriculum by inclusion of Student Projects

Goals:

40% of curriculum to provide for student projects

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
8% of curriculum to provide for student projects	8% of curriculum to provide for student projects	8% of curriculum to provide for student projects	8% of curriculum to provide for student projects	8% of curriculum to provide for student projects

Person Responsible

XYZ

6. Internationalisation of Curriculum

Action Plan:

Curriculum internationalisation to attract foreign students

Goals:

50% internationalisation of curriculum

Execution Plan:

2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-23
10% Internationalisation of curriculum	10% Internationalisation of curriculum	10% Internationalisation of curriculum	10% Internationalisation of curriculum	10% Internationalisation of curriculum

Person Responsible:

XYZ

