FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROCESS OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Natalia PIÓRKOWSKA[1*], Radosław RYŃCA[2]

[1] Wroclaw University of Science and Technology, Wroclaw; natalia.piorkowska@pwr.edu.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-4498-7236
[2] Wroclaw University of Science and Technology, Wroclaw; radoslaw.rynca@pwr.edu.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0001-5288-4686
*Correspondence author

Purpose: Changes in the market of educational services require changes in the management of a higher education institution. The use of strategic management of a higher education institution, which should allow the improvement in the quality of education and research, as well as enable the implementation of innovation and building a strong competitive position also seem to be significant in this respect. Many researchers dealing with the issues of planning, formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies in organisations are aware of the factors identified as success factors and barriers to strategy implementation. The article presents deliberations about higher education in Poland. A synthetic description of higher education is presented. The paper also identifies and presents a proposal to classify factors influencing the process of strategy implementation in a higher education institution.
Design/methodology/approach: The authors of the article, based on an in-depth literature analysis and their own experience, specified 113 factors affecting the strategy implementation process in Polish higher education institutions.
Findings: The authors of the article have decided to reconsider the subject of the effectiveness of strategy implementation in higher education institutions, focusing in particular on the critical factors affecting the effective implementation of a strategy in a higher education institution.
Originality/value: The paper specifies 113 factors affecting the strategy implementation process in Polish higher education institutions.

Keywords: higher education institution, strategic management, strategy implementation factor.

Category of the paper: Strategic management, higher education.

1. Introduction

The process of demographic changes, social transformations and the increasing mobility of students, who choose the most attractive educational offers, force the necessity for many organisations, including higher education institutions, to adapt to new conditions of the environment. These changes in the market of educational services require changes in the management of a higher education institution. The managerial approach to managing an institution, based on the use of management methods and techniques, appropriate planning and use of the possessed resources is of importance. The use of strategic management in case of a higher education institution, which should allow the improvement in the quality of education and research, as well as enable the implementation of innovation and building a strong competitive position, also seem to be significant in this respect. Due to the conditions (both internal and external), in which higher education institutions are currently functioning, many factors may affect the effectiveness of implementation of the strategy at a given moment. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly watch changes taking place in the environment of higher education institutions and to skilfully adapt to the new conditions.

2. Synthetic description of higher education in Poland

Polish higher education, invariably since the 1990s, has been subject to constant changes: economic, legal, political, sociological and demographic. The fact of significant technological progress, globalisation or changing conditions of the environment, i.e. progressive European integration, are also significant. Starting from the transformation of the political system of the Polish state (after 1989), when offers of educational services of non-public higher education institutions appeared on the educational market, hitherto monopolised by public higher education institutions. Factors, which had a significant impact on the education market in Poland at that time, include, among others, changes in the labour market. There was a strong correlation between the remuneration of employees of private enterprises and their skills and qualifications, that is, indirectly related with the level of education. The effect of this dependence was a sudden increase in the number of people who wanted to get a university degree (Pawłowski, 2004). In response to the increased interest of the candidates, public higher education institutions significantly increased the number of places on paid studies, at the same time, successively more and more non-public higher education institutions began to emerge (Pawłowski, 2004). Due to a large number of people interested in studying, higher education institutions had no problems with recruitment of the required number of students for the offered fields of study (Nowaczyk, 2006). The increase in the number of students was observed until

2006. Currently, the number of places offered by higher education institutions significantly exceeds the number of people interested in studying. Carrying out further analysis of the number of students undertaking higher education from the 1990s until now, one can notice that, currently, the number of students significantly decreased, and considering the persisting drop in the birth rate, this trend will only deepen in the future (Pawłowski, 2004). Currently, there is a strong competition on the market of educational services among higher education institutions.

Issues related to the state of Polish higher education and the desired reforms in this area are often discussed in literature on the subject. The World Bank report, among others, which notes that Polish higher education is characterised by a lack of strategy and governmental vision, is generally known. Poor preparation of Polish higher education institutions for functioning on market conditions was also indicated in numerous projects of objectives of the Act – Law on Higher Education (the so-called Act 2.0) and the Act itself (Antonowicz et al., 2016). It seems important to change the way higher education institutions have been managed so far and to strengthen the role of strategic management (Ryńca, 2014). It should be noted, that the problem concerning the functioning and competition of higher education institutions on the common market of educational services does not apply only to Polish higher education, but it is an obstacle for many higher education institutions in Europe, as well as in the world. During the meeting in Glasgow in 2005, the Association of European Universities noted, in the final declaration, among others, that *universities are committed to improving their governing structures and leadership competence, so as to increase their efficiency and to achieve their multiple missions* (EUA, 12.01.2018).

3. Strategic management in higher education – literature review

Contemporary organisations function in a turbulent environment. Development of information and communication technologies, globalisation, aggressive competition, ubiquitous change, multitude of data provided from the environment, speed of operations performed via computers, as well as complexity and the need to manage emerging paradoxes in organisations are determinants, which modern organisations have to face every day (Tetenbaum, 1998). Chaos was defined as a new paradigm of the organisation, where the key to success is the management of paradoxes. However, it should be emphasised, that the chaos, ubiquitous in the environment of organisations, creates particularly dangerous conditions for organisations with a traditional structure, which avoid taking risks – and a higher education institution is one of them (Tetenbaum, 1998). Another characteristic feature of higher education institutions, somehow also resulting from the traditional structure, is the improper or incorrect implementation of the strategic management framework. When talking about strategic management, three basic elements should be mentioned. Namely: creation of a mission, vision

and organisation strategy. A well-formulated mission can indicate factors, which favour or hamper the development of a higher education institution (Ratajczak, 1997). It is emphasised, that the process of formulation of a mission is as important as its content (Koźmiński, 1999).

There are studies confirming that, even in companies with a good market position, practical problems are related to each element of the model, which result in implementation barriers, as well as an implementation gap in the strategy (Wołczek, 2017). The authors of the article agree with the author, who stated that: *The presented problems are intensified by the fact that the increase of practical difficulties related to the implementation of a strategy is not reflected in the adequate development and increase in the number of research and publications serving the recognition of empirical problems* (Wołczek, 2017). This phenomenon was also described by L. Hrebiniak, who indicates that, recently, the strategic management literature has focused on the search for new ideas and tools, which are designed to create strategies, thereby neglecting the area of their implementation (Hrebiniak, 2005). Taking the above into account, the authors of the article have decided to reconsider the subject of the effectiveness of strategy implementation in higher education institutions, focusing, in particular, on the critical factors affecting the effective implementation of a strategy in a higher education institution.

4. Factors affecting the process of strategy implementation in a higher education institution

Many researchers, who deal with the issues of planning, formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies in organisations, are aware of the factors identified as success factors and barriers to strategy implementation. Researchers agree, that there are many discrepancies between the process of formulation and implementation of a strategy which, in the absence of firm actions of the management, can undermine the implementation of the strategy. Similarly, the content of the strategy often has to evolve under the influence of changing conditions of the external environment of the organisation. As indicated by M. Beer and R.A. Eisenstat, the formulation of a strategy and its communication by the management is not synonymous with its implementation (Beer, Eisenstat, 2000). L. Hrebiniak, in turn, emphasises that, at present, much more time is devoted to the process of strategy formulation than to its implementation. Analogous results were obtained by examining the contribution of work on the side of leaders and senior management at individual stages of work on the implementation of the strategy in the organisation (Hrebiniak, 2006). T. Cater and D. Pucko (2010) in the presented research show results, that are not very optimistic, regarding the implementation process of a strategy. Namely, it is indicated that 80% of organisations had a well-formulated strategy, however only 14% of them were able to implement it (Cater, Pucko, 2010).

The authors of the article, based on an in-depth literature analysis and their own experience, specified 113 factors affecting the strategy implementation process in Polish higher education institutions. The results of the work were presented in a tabular summary in Figure 1. The presented classification specifies the following areas: *strategy*, *management* and *employees*. In addition, the authors of the article divided the presented factors according to various stages of the strategy implementation process, starting from the planning and formulation stage, ending with the implementation and control stage. It should be noted, that the classification presented by the authors is a much more comprehensive approach to the issue, not yet presented in the research. The main factor of the presented approach was an attempt to fill the research gap, commonly known to researchers dealing with the issues of strategy implementation in organisations, in this case higher education institutions. Numerous opinions of researchers point towards a too general approach to the studied issues, a relatively small number of papers on the implementation of strategies at higher education institutions, as well as no indication of relations between the factors presented in literature (Radomska, 2017).

Identification and classification of factors was done, among others, by: A. Alharty, H. Rashid, R. Pagliari, F. Khan (Alharty et al., 2017), who presented a list of 25 factors of effective implementation of the strategy. They include: clear objectives, prioritisation, selection, patronage, leadership, effective response to the actions of the competition, bad or unclear strategy, communication, involvement, responsibility, networks of relations, acceptance of employees, commitments, motivation, adequate resources, management of benefits, talent management, customisation, project management, risk management, power, government, performance, monitoring and rewarding (Alharty et al., 2017). In turn, within the area of strategy, P. Wołczek specifies factors, such as: clarity of the assumed objectives of the strategy and its internal cohesion, flexibility of the strategy, the number of strategic objectives included in the strategy, definition of strategic objectives based on the analysis of reality (Wołczek, 2016).

The area defined by the authors of the article as *Management* is also extremely important from the point of view of implementation of the strategy in Polish higher education institutions. The responsibility for the effective implementation of the strategy in the organisation rests on the shoulders of the managing staff. Given the important role of the leadership in the process of effective implementation of the strategy, this area has also been widely studied in terms of the possibility of occurrence of the so-called critical factors, that is, factors which adversely affect the strategy implementation process. Such factors include: hierarchical or liberal management style, lack of skills and knowledge of the leadership to create the strategy, lack of experience of the management in the creation of the strategy, lack of ability to manage changes and overcome resistance to changes, lack of managers' involvement in the process of strategy formulation and lack of leaders effectively motivating employees to implement the strategy

(Beer, and Eisenstat, 2000; Hrebiniak, 2006; Ĉater, and Puĉko, 2010; Neilson et al., 2008; Wołczek, 2017).

Identification and classification of critical factors was done, among others, by: M. Beer and R.A. Eisenstat, listing the so-called *6 silent killers of the strategy*: a hierarchical or liberal management style of the senior management, unclear strategy and contradictory priorities, ineffective senior management, poor vertical communication, poor communication of actions across functions, businesses or organisational boundaries, inadequate leadership skills of lower-level managers and lack of potential for their development. As you can see, all the factors mentioned by the authors are closely related to the skills and management style of the leadership (Beer, R.A. Eisenstat, 2000). A similar classification is made by L.G. Hrebiniak, who, after examining a group of managers participating in the process of strategy formulation and implementation, specified 5 key factors hindering the implementation of the strategy: inability to effectively manage changes or overcome internal resistance to changes, attempting to implement a strategy which conflicts with the existing power structure, weak or insufficient sharing of information between the entities responsible for the implementation of the strategy, unclear communication of responsibility and/or unclear responsibility for the implementation of decisions or actions, weak or unclear strategy (Hrebiniak, 2005).

Making the above analysis, it should be clearly stated, that the following factors are also important in the process of effective implementation of the strategy: lack of skills to prioritise tasks, lack or incorrect selection of key indicators for the strategy implementation process, failure to use implementation programmes, lack of stakeholder orientation, lack or incorrect allocation of resources, incorrect allocation of decision-making powers, incorrect division of tasks and responsibilities, lack of coordination of actions, lack of coupling of strategic and operational activities and too long decision-making time.

The last research area within the identification and classification of factors affecting the strategy implementation process is *Employees*. According to the authors of the article, the specification of this area seemed almost necessary, due to the importance of this group in the strategy implementation process. Because Employees are the main implementers of strategic plans. Many researchers have attempted to identify and classify critical factors also in this area (Neilson et al., 2008; Wołczek, 2017). For example, G.L. Neilson, K.L. Martin and E. Powers listed 17 features of organisations, which are key to the process of strategy implementation: everyone has a good understanding of decisions and actions, which they are responsible for, important information about the competitive environment quickly reaches the company's headquarters, decisions – once made – are rarely criticised, information flows freely across organisational boundaries, field and line workers usually have the information they need to understand the impact of daily choices on the company's financial performance, managers have access to data necessary to calculate key business indicators, line managers are involved in making operational decisions, contradictory information reaches the market, individual process of performance evaluation, ability to fulfil the assigned obligations, organisational

culture, the role of a team in supporting business, the possibility of horizontal promotion on the same hierarchy level, lower-level employees have the possibility of promotion, the composition of middle-level manager teams, motivation and rewarding, as well as the occurrence of other motivators, except for financial ones (Neilson et al., 2008)

In line with the below, it can be clearly stated that the area of *Employees* is extremely important in the light of the effective implementation of the strategy. The authors performing a detailed analysis of this area additionally listed factors, such as: lack of skills, knowledge and experience of employees in implementing the strategy, lack of trust of employees in the management, negative interactions between individual departments, increased scepticism of employees, resistance to submitting own ideas, destructive loyalty, as well as competition between employees and departments.

The overriding aim of the paper was to identify possible threats and trouble spots, which the management of a higher education institution should take into account in the process of strategic management. Then, through appropriate management, behaviour and attitude, the management can influence employees, thus expanding the activities as part of the effective implementation of the strategy. Attention should be paid to the significance of the presented issue, as the lack or not very detailed classification of factors affecting the process of strategy implementation may not only negatively affect the strategy implementation process, but can also be a serious threat to the development of Polish higher education institutions (Table 1).

Table 1.

Identification of factors affecting the process of strategy implementation

	Planning	Formulating	Implementation	Control and monitoring
Strategy	No strategic plans	Incorrect formulation of the strategy	Problem with explaining the strategy	The inflexibility of the strategy
	Lack of connection between tactical plans, the strategy and strategic objectives	Content of the strategy	Inability to transpose ideas into ready actions	No possibility to monitor the strategy
	Lack of connection between the vision and operational activities	Unclear and fuzzy strategy	Lack of knowledge of the strategy at all levels of the organisation	
	Lack of fundamental knowledge about the strategy	Unrealistically defined strategic objectives	Disturbances on the relation between the general strategy and smaller strategy of smaller units	
	Conflicting priorities	Excessive number of objectives	Lack of direct executors of the strategy	
	Internal inconsistency of the strategy with the vision, schedule, objectives and budget	Not formalised strategy	Weak or insufficient communication of information between entities responsible for the implementation of the strategy	
	Ineffective system of obtaining and selecting information	Excessive complexity of the strategy	Lack of consistent implementation of strategic objectives	
	Incorrect calculation of funds for the strategy implementation	Lack of schedule and indication of "milestones"	No communication of information on the progress of the strategy implementation	
	Acquiring no additional sources of financing for the implementation of the strategy	Inconsistency of the strategy with the general strategic direction of development	No reflection of the strategy in current operational activities	
	The strategy is in conflict with the existing organisational structure	No communication of the strategy		
	Unreal and unclear development concepts, impossible to implement	Unnecessary bureaucracy		
		Failure to specify and define the impact of currently formed projects on the implementation of the strategy		
		Failure to specify and define the impact of formed development concepts on ongoing projects		

Cont. table 1.

Management	Hierarchical or liberal management style	Unclear course of the strategy management process	Lack of experience of the management in implementing the strategy	Lack of an effective evaluation and control system
	Lack of knowledge and skills of the leadership to create the strategy	Lack of managers' involvement in the process of strategy formulation	Lack of or poorly developed skills of the leadership	Lack of strategic controlling
	Lack of experience of the management in the creation of the strategy	Lack of skills to engage employees	Lack of coordination of activities	Failure to appoint a supervisory controller
	No ability to prioritise tasks	Lack of an appropriate system of incentives and rewards for the employees	Lack of charismatic leaders among the leadership	Erroneous or incorrect monitoring of activities
	Lack or incorrect selection of key indicators for the strategy implementation process	Lack or incorrect allocation of resources	No consequences of actions	Lack of an effective measurement system
	Lack of adequate education	Lack of involvement of a wider group of employees in the stage of formulation of the strategy	Lack of stimulation of desired behaviour of employees	Lack of ability to identify the main implementation problems of the strategy
	Failure to use implementation programmes	Improper distribution of decision-making powers	Overburdening the leadership with current affairs	
	Short-term thinking	Erroneous division of tasks and responsibilities	Lack of leaders effectively motivating employees to implement the strategy	
	No access to data and indicators	Problem with delegation of tasks	Lack of linkage between strategic and operational actions	
	Lack of ability to manage changes and overcome resistance to changes	Lack of effective communication of objectives of the strategy	Too long time of making decisions	
	Lack of orientation on stakeholders	Unclear communication of responsibility	The decision-making mechanism working improperly	
	Personality of managers	Failure to define the rules of cooperation	Lack of effective response to the actions of the competition	
	Lack of intellectual flexibility of managers	Lack of assignment of indicators and economic indicators to strategic objectives	Lack of management flexibility	
	Failure to determine supervisory and decision-making relations between the governing body and lower level managers	Ineffective employee training systems	Lack of effective reactions to the external environment	

Cont. table 1.

	Selection of inappropriate tools for the implementation of the strategy	Perceptible division into creators and executors of the strategy	Lack of support of the management for actions initiated by lower-level employees	
	Not paying attention to the importance of organisational culture		A sense of uncertainty among the managerial staff	
			Lack of consensus between decision makers	
Employees	Lack of skills, knowledge and experience among employees in the implementation of the strategy	Reluctance to report own ideas	Ignorance of the strategy among all employees	Employees receive incorrect or abstract information about the implementation of subsequent strategic objectives
	Lack of trust of employees towards the leadership	Destructive loyalty	No feedback from the course of actions in the framework of implementation of the strategy	
	Lack of cooperation and teamwork skills	Lack of involvement of employees in the process of strategy formulation	Resistance to change	
	Negative interactions between individual departments	Lack of a sense of responsibility among employees	Employees crucial in terms of implementation of the strategy do not identify with it	
	Increased scepticism of employees		No reflection of the strategy in current activities	
			Orientation towards actions	
			Lack of people responsible for the implementation of the strategy	
			Decrease in involvement of the employees	
			Lack of motivation of employees	
			Employees are reluctant to share knowledge and information about the strategy	
			Lack of acceptance of the strategy by employees at lower levels	
			Frequent criticism of decisions made by the management	
			"Interest groups"	
			Competition between both employees and departments	

Source: own study based on: G.L. Neilson, K.L. Martin, E. Powers, 2008, pp. 61-70; A. Alharty, H. Rashid, R. Pagliari, F. Khan, 2017, pp. 34-44.; T. Ĉatera and D. Pučko, 2010, pp. 207-236.; J. Radomska, 2017, p. 8

5. Summary

The process of demographic changes, social transformations and the increasing mobility of students force the necessity for many organisations, including higher education institutions, to adapt to the new conditions of the environment. More efficient use of resources, analysis of the needs of stakeholders of a higher education institution, as well as the use of organizational management seem to be a key driver of raising the competitive position of a higher education institution. The future of higher education in Poland will largely depend on the effective management of a higher education institution and the improvement of its activities and moving towards a specific direction. The use of strategic management in the process of planning future activities is also important. Therefore, it seems necessary to identify factors, which influence the process of strategy formulation and implementation. This article presents proposals for classifying factors relevant to the implementation of strategies at their various stages (planning, formulation, implementation and strategy control). It was pointed out, that the difficulties with the implementation of a strategy may be related to its specificity (lack of knowledge about the strategy, unclear definition of objectives or difficulties with it cascading to lower levels in the organisational structure). They may also apply to the management of a higher education institution, as well as to the employees subordinate to them. At further stage of the conducted research, it seems necessary to verify the discussed factors and attempt to adapt them to the specifics of various types of higher education institutions.

References

1. Alharty, A., Rashid, H., Pagliari, R., Khan, F. (2017). Identification of Strategy Implementation Influencing Factors and Their Effects on the Performance, *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 8, 1, January*.

2. Antonowicz, D., Brdulak, J., Hulicka, M., Jędrzejewski, T., Kowalski, R., Kulczycki, E., Szadkowski, K., Szot, A., Wolszczak-Derlacz, J., Kwitek, M. (2016). Reformować? Nie reformować? Szerszy kontekst zmian w szkolnictwie wyższym, *Nauka, 4*, ISSN 1231-8515.

3. Beer, M., Eisenstat, R.A. (2000). The Silent Killers of Strategy Implementation and Learning, *Sloan Management Review*.

4. Cater, T., Pucko, D. (2010). Factors of effective strategy implementation: Empirical evidence from Slovenian business practice, *Journal for East European Management Studies, 15, 3*.

5. De Wit, B., Meyer R. (2007). *Synteza strategii*. Warszawa: PWE.

6. *Diagnoza stanu szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce*, Raport cząstkowy. Warszawa: Ernst&Young oraz Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową.

7. EUA (2018, 12.01). *3rd EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions*. Retrived from: http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info.

8. Hrebiniak, L.G. (2005). *Making strategy work. Leading effective execution and change*, Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

9. Hrebiniak, L.G. (2006). Obstacles to effective strategy implementation. *Organizational Dynamics.*

10. Konferencja Rektorów Akademickich Szkół Państwowch (2019, 02.01). *Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego 2010-2020 – Projekt środowiskowy.* Retrieved from: http://krasp.strony.uw.edu.pl.

11. Koźmiński, A.K. (1999). Misje i strategie szkół wyższych. In: J. Woźnicki (ed.), *Model zarządzania publiczną instrukcją akademicką.* Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

12. Maraga, A. (2006). The cultural legitimacy of the European University, *Highter Education in Europe, 31(4),* DOI 10.1080/03797720701303897.

13. Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., Lampel, J. (1989). *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Managemen,* New York: The Free Press.

14. Neilson, G.L., Martin, K.L., Powers, E. (2008). The secrets to successful strategy execution, *Harvard Business Review*.

15. Nowaczyk, G., Lisiecki, P. (2006). Marketingowe zarządzanie szkołą wyższą [Marketing management of a higher education institution], Poznań: Wydawnictwo WSB.

16. Pawłowski, K. (2004). Przyszłość polskiego szkolnictwa wyższego w kontekście wyzwań postawionych przed uczelniami europejskimi przez Komisję Europejską, Model współdziałania uczelni publicznych i niepublicznych – stan obecny i perspektywy, J. Woźnicki (ed.). Warszawa: Instytut Społeczeństwa Wiedzy.

17. Pawłowski, K. (2004). *Społeczeństwo wiedzy szansa dla Polski* [Society of knowledge, a chance for Poland], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.

18. Radomska, J. (2017). *Ryzyko operacyjne w procesie realizacji strategii*, Wrocław: PWN.

19. Ratajczak, Z. (1997). Jakość kształcenia jako przedmiot misji uniwersytetu. In: M. Wójcicka (ed.), *Zapewnienie jakości kształcenia. Wprowadzenie do samooceny*. Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.

20. Ryńca, R. (2014). *Zastosowanie wybranych metod i narzędzi w ocenie działalności szkoły wyższej* [The use of selected methods and tools in the assessment of activity of a higher education institution], Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej.

21. *Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce do 2020 roku i diagnoza stanu szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce, Raport cząstkowy*. Warszawa: Ernst&Young oraz Instytut Badań nad Gospodarką Rynkową.

22. *Szkolnictwo wyższe w Polsce* (Raport nr 29718). Warszawa: Bank Światowy, Europejski Bank Inwestycyjny.

23. Tetenbaum, T.J. (1998). *From Newton to Chaos, Organizational Dynamics*, DOI 10.1016/S0090-2616(98)90003-1.

24. Wołczek, P. (2016). *Problemy wdrażania strategii w małych przedsiębiorstwach – wyniki badań,* Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu.

25. Wołczek, P. (2017). *Model wdrażania strategii – wnioski z badań empirycznych liderów biznesów,* Warszawa: Handel Wewnętrzny, ISSN 0438-5403.