

Rethinking Strategy in Higher Education: An Approach Driven by Stakeholders and Competencies

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Introdução

Strategic planning in higher education faces growing complexity as universities navigate pluralistic environments and rising societal expectations. Aligning internal competencies with external demands strengthens institutional legitimacy and coherence. This study addresses these challenges through a structured, participatory approach applied to the University of São Paulo (USP).

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

Universities often struggle to align their strategic planning processes with both the expectations of diverse stakeholders and the institution's distinctive internal capabilities. This study aims to address this challenge by developing and applying a structured and participatory method that connects these external expectations with internal competencies, enabling the formulation of coherent, legitimate, and mission-driven strategic objectives in complex academic environments.

Fundamentação Teórica

The study draws on Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes managing multiple and diverse interests, and Resource-Based View, which highlights internal competencies as sources of sustained advantage. Both perspectives are adapted to the specific context of public universities, recognizing their unique missions and governance structures.

Metodologia

The proposed method unfolds in six stages: stakeholder mapping, competencies analysis, deliberative workshops, and consolidation of strategic objectives. It was tested at USP, engaging over 600 participants across six campuses, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection, content analysis, and participatory governance principles.

Análise dos Resultados

The application of the method enabled the identification of core organizational competencies and the articulation of general strategic objectives across key institutional areas. From this process, twelve strategic priorities were defined to guide the university's long-term direction. The method strengthened stakeholder engagement, fostered integration among decentralized units, and aligned institutional competencies with societal expectations.

Conclusão

The proposed structured method enables universities to formulate strategies aligned with their mission by integrating organizational competencies and stakeholder expectations. Its success depends on participatory structures that support institutional learning and reflexivity, allowing for continuous adaptation and relevance in decentralized and complex higher education environments.

Contribuição / Impacto

The study contributes a replicable, flexible model for strategic planning in higher education. It reinforces participatory governance, strengthens alignment between competencies and societal needs, and offers practical guidance for institutions facing complexity, decentralization, and resource constraints.

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