

# **INTEGRATING STRATEGIC QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF CORPORATE STRATEGY – INITIAL LESSONS: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITI BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

**Fairul Rizal Haji Rashid**  
*Universiti Brunei, Brunei Darussalam*

## **ABSTRACT**

Managing quality is basically the same with other aspects of management; it requires strategies formulation, goal settings, development of action plans, implementation plans and provision of control and feedback mechanism for corrective actions to be taken. It is thus imperative not to see quality management as solely a controlling device; rather it must be seen as a management function that must be institutionalized in different levels of organizations. In fact, many excellent organizations have demonstrated that quality has an important strategic value in today's competitive world. Furthermore, in today's complex and changing environments, organizations are also forced to formulate strategy and plan their actions so as to achieve the desired positive results. In order to remain effective over time, organization must have a formal strategic management mechanism that would give direction to the attainment of the goals and objectives. The key success, therefore, required organizations to fully understand quality philosophies and to integrate quality in the strategic management process. In relations to this, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) have also experienced ever-changing environments and challenges in order to stay competitive and to cope with higher expectations from key stakeholders and 'customers'. Consequently, many HEIs have also realized and seen quality practices as a practical strategy to be pursued. Although there have been an increasing quality related research done in the context of HEIs, there is still a lack of research that focused on the development of strategic quality planning process.

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Strategic Quality Management, High Educational Institutions (HEIs), Academic Strategy and Administrative Strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Managing quality is basically the same with other aspects of management; it requires strategies formulation, goal settings, development of action plans, implementation plans and provision of control and feedback mechanism for corrective actions to be taken. It is thus imperative not to see quality management as solely a controlling device; rather it must be seen as a management function that must be institutionalized in different levels of organizations (Calingo, 1996, 19). In fact, many excellent organizations have demonstrated that quality has an important strategic value in today's competitive world. Furthermore, in today's complex and changing environments, organizations also need to formulate strategy and plan their actions so as to achieve the desirable results. In order to remain effective over time, organization must have a formal strategic management mechanism that would give direction to the attainment of the goals and objectives (Hacker, *et al.*, 2001, 222). The key success, therefore, required organizations to fully understand quality philosophies and to integrate quality in the strategic management process. In this regard, higher educational institutions (HEIs) have also experienced ever-changing environments and challenges in order to stay competitive and to cope with higher expectations from key stakeholders and 'customers'. Consequently, many HEIs have also realized and seen quality practices as a practical strategy to be pursued (Tari, 2005, 170). Although there have been increasing quality related researches done in the context of HEIs (e.g.: Owlia and Aspinwall, 1997; Michael, *et al.*, 1997; Lagrosen, 2004; Ventrakaraman, 2007, etc), there is still a lack of research that focus on the development of strategic quality planning process.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the rationale and approaches in integrating strategic quality initiatives with the corporate-wide strategic planning process and to present some initial lessons as experienced by *Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD)*.

### 1.1 Brief Background of UBD

#### 1985 – 1995

UBD started its academic programs in a temporary campus with the first intake of 176 students on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1985. The establishment of UBD immediately followed the announcement made His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam, and in which he has expressed the wish to see Brunei to have its own university to facilitate national development. At the beginning, though UBD has faced some initial start-up problems, the university has managed to achieve commendable results in its academic programs, both its undergraduates and post-graduates programs, during the first decade.

#### 1996 - 2005

In the second decade of its establishment, UBD has achieved many distinguished results to become the premier HEI in the country. Some of the major accomplishments include:-

- Moving to a new and bigger campus with a first class infrastructure.
- Expand and enhance the quality of the university's undergraduates and post-graduates programs to cater for the increasing number of students enrolled and the changing nature of the labor market.

- Offer variety of professional training programs for government and private sectors.
- Conduct active research programs, consultancy services and provides much needed assistance to the community.
- Provide more opportunity for local academic staff to take up both managerial and leadership positions in the university.
- Approximately 55% of the university's staff are now occupied by local and 45% are made of expatriates
- The university now has 8 academic faculties that offer programs of various disciplines. It has more than 3600 students with up to 100 international students. Since its first convocation in 1989, UBD has produced up to 10,000 graduates which include 2 PhD graduates.

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, IV).

### 2006 -2015

In today's complex, ever rapid and changing environments, higher expectations and intense competition faced by HEIs around the globe, UBD realizes that the formula of past success may not be applicable in the future. Looking ahead in the next decade, the university recognizes the imperative to change from a mere national institution that exclusively serves national needs to an internationally recognized HEI to serve regional market. In order to achieve this, UBD requires a new vision of success and new strategic priorities to be focused on. In this respect, UBD has embarked on a new strategic plan for the next ten years (2006-2015) with full emphasis given to the quality aspects of key strategic areas that are deemed critical for UBD to remain relevant, to ensure its future success and to achieve its new vision:-

*"A first-class university, a distinctive national identity".*

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, VI).

## **2. THE INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIC QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING OF UBD**

The university new strategic plan aims to provide a framework for the university to realize its new vision and mission which are aligned with the national development strategy (2006-2015) and the ministry's education strategy (2006-2015) (Please refer to Appendix 1 for the Alignment of the UBD Strategic Plan with Other National Strategies).

Based on the strategic analysis made by the university strategic planning team, the following strategic objectives are formulated and identified to be critical for transforming UBD:-

- i) To produce quality graduates who are knowledgeable in specific disciplines with exposure to interdisciplinary knowledge and who are equipped with high ethical values, and sufficient competencies and skills so as to ensure that their academic qualifications and personal development are valuable and marketable;
- ii). To offer academic programs of excellent quality and standards which are highly regarded by the society and recognized by the international community;

- iii) To contribute significantly to the development of pure and applied knowledge through various focal research programs supported by the university or jointly with other local and international institutions;
- iv). To provide valued academic and professional services to the state, society and economy of Brunei Darussalam to fulfill the national development needs and demands through research, consultancy, training and community services.
- v). To acquire more and new resources, both financial and non-financial, to support the development of the university as an autonomous, high performing and first class international institution.

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 11).

In this respect, the university has formulated a corporate strategy that encompassed both the academic strategy and the supporting administrative strategy. This corporate strategy is described using strategy maps and adopting the balanced scorecard approach. It acts as guidelines for detail plans to be developed by the respective faculties, the supporting service departments and the central administration of the university. In addition, it ensures that all the strategies or action plans carried out by the faculties and the administrative departments would be aligned towards the realization of the strategic objectives and hence the vision of UBD.

## **2.1 The UBD's Academic Strategy**

Under the UBD corporate-level academic strategy, the following strategic performance objectives have been identified that would contribute significantly toward the attainment of strategic objectives stated above:-

- Develop quality, flexible, inter-disciplinary and marketable academic programs that meet the demand of the industry and community.
- Enhance the quality of teaching and learning.
- Produce more relevant and quality researches that are utilize effectively.
- Provide excellent professional training, consultancy and community services.
- Build good rapport and strong partnership with government, private sector and society.
- Increase the staff and student participation in the university affairs
- Improve the quality of support and related technology services.
- Provide excellent administrative services in order to facilitate the attainment of UBD strategic objectives and vision.

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 12).

In order to realize the strategic performance objectives above, the following work context related criteria must be met:-

- The employees of the university, both academic and administrative staff, must be well-trained, skillful, knowledgeable and well taken care of that enabled them to carry out their respective tasks effectively.

- Foster strong organizational culture that promotes strong leadership and teamwork amongst its employees.
- The provision of effective and efficient ICT infrastructure and associated information systems
- Strong alignment of the university corporate strategy with the key stakeholders i.e. government, private sector and community.

All the above criteria and the strategy development will not be operating effectively if financial resources have not been allocated adequately. Therefore it is imperative for UBD to acquire additional financial resources apart from depending solely on the government funding. Furthermore financing can also be acquired from a better financial management on the current funds so any form of waste can be reduced and ensure efficiency of the scarce resource allocation.

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 12).

(Please refer to Appendix 2 for the strategy map or framework of the University's Academic Strategic Plan).

It is important to note that the development of UBD's academic strategy is derived five specific strategic areas as listed below:

- Undergraduate teaching and learning.
- Post-graduate teaching and learning.
- Research and Publications.
- Consultancy and specialized training services.
- Community services.

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 14).

Each of the strategic themes listed above have it own strategic maps similar to the overall university's academic strategy as shown in Appendix 2.

(Please refer to Appendix 3 for the strategy map of the Undergraduate Teaching and Learning).

## **2.2 The UBD's Administrative Strategy**

The main purpose of the university administrative strategy is to ensure full and excellent support for the university academic strategy to be implemented successfully and hence led to the fulfillment of the strategic objectives and vision of UBD. In general, quality assurance needs to be achieved at all levels of the university administration which would allow quality service to be delivered to internal stakeholders or 'customers'(students, staff and faculties). Under the administrative strategy, the following strategic outcomes are considered crucial that need to be achieved:-

- Assure the quality of administrative service.
- Enhance the campus environment so they are clean, attractive and lead to greater vibrant in the campus community.

- Provide effective and timely administrative problem- related solutions to ‘customers’
- Instill confidence in ‘customers’ through the adoption of best practices and expertise.

(The UBD’s Strategic Plan, 2005, 24).

Just like the academic strategy, key strategic performance objectives have been identified that could contribute to the realization of the above strategic administrative outcomes:-

- Strengthen and nurture relationships with the internal ‘customers’, private sector and community
- Strengthen relationship with the Ministry of Education and other key public agencies in order to improve the current work process and quality services to ‘customers’.
- Ensure compliance with the central ministries’ regulations and standing orders.
- Engage in proactive communication with ‘customers’ and use varieties of approaches to learn more about the ‘customers’ wants
- Continuously improve or seek innovation in the key administrative processes that are critical to the university by adopting best practices from leading organizations, university and by leveraging the expertise within the university.
- Promote more cross-departmental teams and services.
- Optimize the use of technology in order to achieve work efficiencies and effectiveness and increase ‘customer’ satisfaction.

(The UBD’s Strategic Plan, 2005, 26).

The attainment of the key strategic performance objectives will depend essentially on the achieved improvements on the UBD administrative capacity and work related context. In this regard, the following areas need to be focused on :-

- Providing staff with the resources, tools and opportunities for them to increase their knowledge, competencies and skills to perform their jobs.
- Create mechanisms to acknowledge and appreciation staff who perform well to uphold university’s strategic values, priorities and objectives.
- Promote the spirit of teamwork, innovative thinking and behaviours and collaboration within the university community.
- Develop a high performance organizational culture that provides excellent service to ‘customers’.
- Demonstrate leadership through personal responsibility and initiative.
- Develop comprehensive information systems to support the critical administrative processes.
- Determine the informational and resource requirements to support and implement strategic initiatives respectively.

In order to implement the administrative strategy, apart from the government funding, acquiring new financial resources together with better and effective management of both financial and non-financial resources are indeed crucial

(The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 27).

(Please refer to Appendix 4 for the UBD Administrative Strategy Map)

It is to be noted that many of the strategic initiatives derived from the university's new strategic plan have encompassed elements of strategic quality management. This is as expected since lessons learnt from many of the award-winning or first class organizations had perceived both the strategic management and quality management as "two faces of the same process" that contribute to the organization's success (Calingo, 1996, p. 19). Thus, the university has placed strategic quality management as a major program to be undertaken by the university as soon as possible. This is arguably the "right" approach taken by the university in pursuing excellence and achieving its new vision. The strategy-quality integration process during the formulation and initial stage of development of UBD's strategic plan are evident as described below:-

The establishment of the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) that consist of principal officers of the respective faculties, the supporting service departments and the central administration of the university to collectively draft the university corporate strategy stated above is an important resource in strategic quality planning. This team-based and participative approach would facilitate better and broad understanding of the 'customers' needs and key drivers that change the world of higher education (Evans and Lindsay, 2005, 220). At the same time, this would allow the strategy implementation to be carried out effectively and well-accepted amongst the key internal stakeholders of the university.

Moreover, during the early stage of development of the university's strategic plan process, many quality goals are apparently developed from the university strategic academic and administrative objectives stated above. These include:

- Enhancing the quality of teaching.
- To enhance life-long skills of the students that matched with the demand and requirement of the industry/employer.
- Assure the quality of administrative service in serving the staff and students.

The quality goals above are focused on the attainment of both internal and external 'customers' satisfaction. This realization is indeed crucial in any quality planning initiative because satisfying customers, both internal and external, is simply the bottom line of quality management (e.g: Calingo, 1996; Dale, 2004 and Evans and Lindsay, 2005; etc). Although, as stated by Michael, *et al.* (1997, 107) there is no consensus in defining 'customers' in the context of higher education, nonetheless, internal 'customers' in the context of UBD could include both the employees and students, and 'external 'customer' refers to the employer who would "consume" the student product.

Another strategic quality plan identified by UBD is by undertaking a self-assessment of university quality through achieving the accreditation of ASEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORK (AUN) Quality Assurance (QA) standard. Dale (2004, 472) stated that self-

assessment process against the excellence model allows the organization to determine its strengths and areas where improvement needs to be developed that are then monitor for progress. So at this early stage of UBD's strategic plan, the self-assessment quality approach is aimed to facilitate and provide guidelines for the effective implementation, based on an international standard, of the university academic and administrative strategy.

Many benefits (e.g.: Dale, 2004; Tari, 2005; etc) have been acquired by organizations including the HEIs through the self assessment process which include improve service quality, create quality awareness, encourage employee involvement and ownership, drive continuous improvement, keep costs down, improve bottom line results, etc.

### **2.3 UBD's Action Plan**

In this early phase of implementation of the UBD's Strategic Plan, the university has already embarked on some action plans such as the following:

- Developing and revising various questionnaires and conducting periodic evaluation research in order to assess various key aspects of academic quality. Some of the completed assessments include the quality of teaching and learning, the employer's survey, staff survey, etc;
- Conducting a major curriculum review of all academic programs in all faculties in order to fulfill the human resource requirements needed for the national development. This curriculum reviews is intended to be conducted in every five years (The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 20).
- Conducting continuous executive development workshops which aim at enhancing leadership and management competencies in certain areas of management ( including quality management) for all senior university officers;
- Providing strategic management services (including strategic quality management) to the Vice Chancellor' Office. This includes the appointment of a representative from each faculty to act as a Service Quality Champion.
- Inviting external consultant who has expertise in AUN QA accreditation program to assist the university to perform the self assessment exercise on the internal processes in order to conform to the AUN QA accreditation criteria;

In this early phase of UBD's Strategic Plan implementation, there are certain challenges faced by the university and which need to be addressed to ensure continuous success in transforming the university to realize its new vision:-

- Having ample financial resources dedicated for any strategic change and strategic quality improvement initiatives are indeed crucial (e.g.: Sashkin and Kiser, 1993; Dale, 2004; Cumming and Worley, 2005; Venkatraman, 2007; etc). Hence it is a challenge for UBD to obtain required funds for its strategic planning initiatives which is not just solely depends on government funding but also to seek other sources of funding especially from areas of teaching, research and consultancy services (The UBD's Strategic Plan, 2005, 5).
- Having sufficient human resource requirements is also another crucial strategic aspect or challenge that UBD needs to address. This is vital because human asset is

essentially required to “implement” and manage the strategy or change efforts collectively. Thus, UBD need to be more flexible, responsive and to be more autonomous in its policy, management of human, finance and other key resources (The UBD’s Strategic Plan, 2005, 5).

- Managing strategy requires effective change management and involves a paradigm shift in the mindset of the entire organization (Venkatraman, 2007, 98). Therefore, it is indeed a challenging task for UBD to change the mindsets of the university’s workforce from all levels of management and faculty staff in the implementation of strategic planning initiatives. In this regard, it is crucial that the strategic initiatives and any quality improvement initiatives to be communicated and deployed effectively to the university’s staff. Consequently, every staff will know exactly their role, incentives and importance in achieving the strategy toward the attainment of goals and objectives (Evans and Lindsay, 2007, 225). On the other hand, not to perceive strategic quality planning efforts merely as a fad or window-dressing and as an additional burden to them.

At the corporate level, leadership and top management commitment are very crucial factors for ensuring that the strategy-quality implementation initiatives be continuously pursued with all the attending risks and uncertainties. The top management must be willing to initiate change, visibly committed and play the role of ‘quality champion and sponsor’ if they really expect the whole workforce to do the same (Venkatraman, 2007, 98). It is also vital that sufficient resources must be provided for any efforts geared toward the attainment of vision. This includes training and education, rewards and incentives given accordingly to the high achievers in order to show appreciation on their endeavor and contribution toward the strategy implementation (The UBD’s Strategic Plan, 2005, 29).

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

The UBD’s new strategic plan has focused on key strategic areas that are critical for the university to remain relevant and ensure its future success, and to better prepare itself with the uncertain and competitive environments and challenges of the 21st century academic world. By developing a formal and systematic strategic plan has certainly enabled UBD to map out its strategic framework that would guide its respective faculties, administrative departments and the central administration of the university to formulate their own detail plans that would align toward the attainment of the organization strategic goals and objectives. The existence of various strategic quality initiatives in the context of UBD’s corporate strategy necessitates the development of a strategic quality management approach in the implementation of the university corporate strategy. The successful efforts from the integration of corporate strategy and quality management have been demonstrated in many of first-class organizations (Calingo, 1996, 34). In this regard, the adoption of the strategy-quality integration process at UBD is not entirely new and must continuously be pursued in order guide the university to produce desirable results.

It is anticipated that the journey towards achieving academic and administrative quality would be a long, uneasy and never-ending process. We are aware that sustained and strong leadership and top management commitment are crucial for successful implementation of

the corporate strategy and strategic quality initiatives. Nevertheless, results from initial implementation have been quite encouraging. It is hope that with greater support, commitment and cooperation from every member of university's community, the university will realize its vision and transform itself to become a first-class university in the region with a distinctive national identity.

## REFERENCES

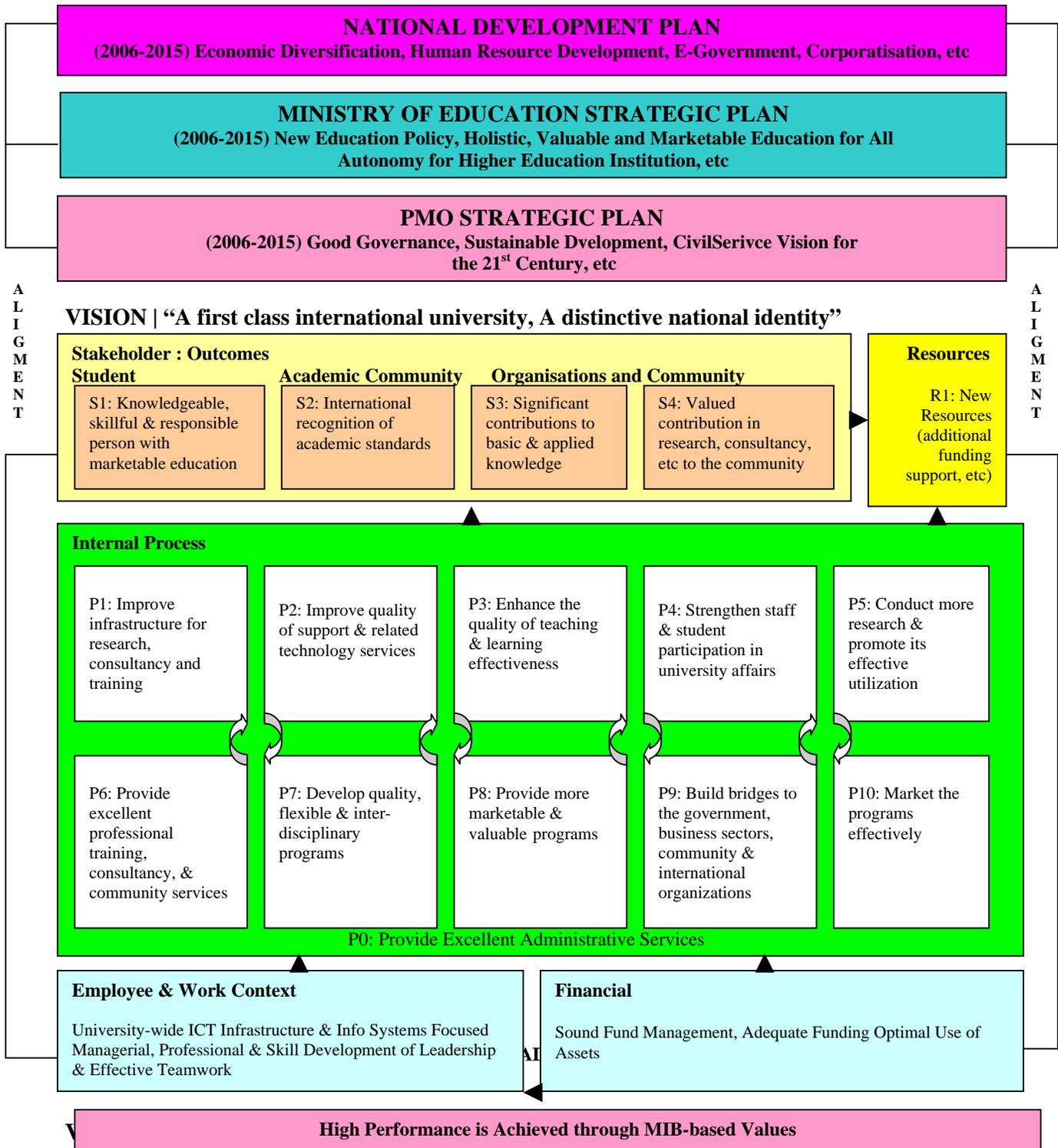
- Calingo, Luis Maria R. 1996. The Evolution of Strategic Quality Management, *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 13 (9): 19-37.
- Cummings, G. and Worley, G. 2005. *Organisation Development and Change- 8<sup>th</sup> edition*, U.S.A.: South Western College Publishing.
- Dale, Brian G. 2004 *Managing Quality- 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Evans, James R. and Lindsay, William M. 2005. *The Management and Control of Quality*. Singapore: Thomson South Western.
- Hacker, Maria E., Kotnour, Tim, and Mallak, Larry A. 2001. Formalizing deployment process in the US Government, *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 14 (3): 221- 240.
- Lagrosen, S., Roxana, S., and Leitner, M. 2004. Examination of the dimensions of quality in higher education, *Quality Assurance in Education*, 12 (2): 61-69.
- Michael, Raymond K., Sower, Victor E. and Motwani, J. 1997. A comprehensive model for implementing total quality management in higher education, *Benchmarking for Quality & Technology*, 4 (2): 104- 120.
- Owlia, Muhammad S. and Aspinwall, Elaine M. 1997. TQM in higher education – a review, *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 14 (5): 527-543.
- Shahkin, M. and Kiser, J. 1993. *Putting Total Quality Management to Work*. U. S. A: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Tari, Juan Jose. 2005. An EFQM model self-assessment exercise at a Spanish university, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44 (2):170-188.
- The UBD's Strategic Plan 2006-2015 Summary Report*. 2005. Universiti Brunei Darussalam: Brunei Darussalam.
- “UBD Closes 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration” *Ungkayah*, October – December 2006.

Universiti Brunei Darussalam. *About Us: UBD in brief*. Universiti Brunei Darussalam,  
<http://www.ubd.edu.bn/about/brief/index.htm>

Venkatraman, S. 2007. A framework for implementing TQM in higher education programs, *Quality Assurance in Education*, 15 (1): 92- 112.

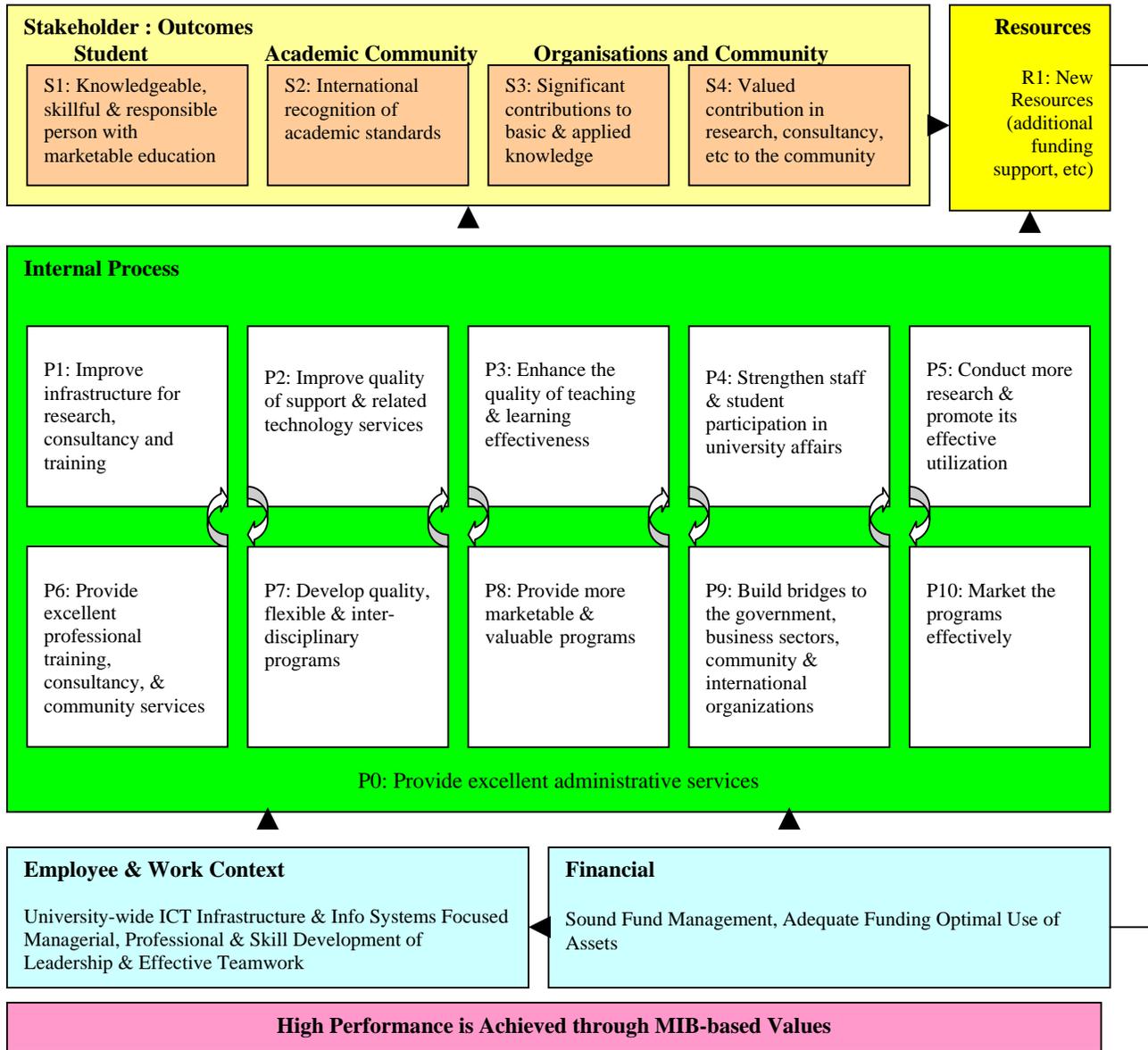
APPENDIX 1 |

THE ALIGNMENT OF THE UBD STRATEGIC PLAN WITH OTHER NATIONAL STRATEGIES



Source: The UBD's Strategic Plan 2006-2015 Summary Report. 2005. Universiti Brunei Darussalam: Brunei Darussalam. 9

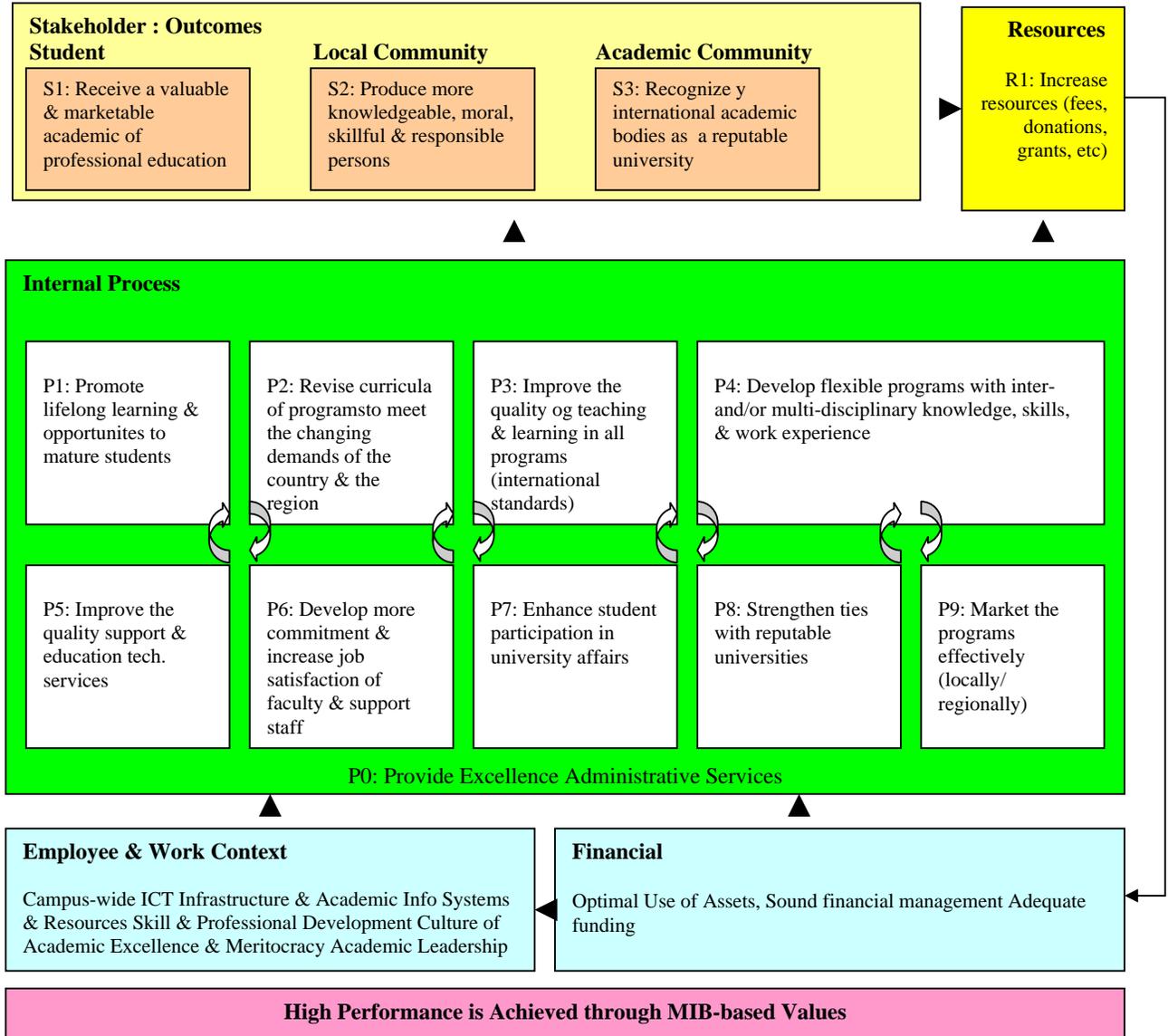
**APPENDIX 2**



Source: The UBD's Strategic Plan 2006-2015 Summary Report. 2005. Universiti Brunei Darussalam: Brunei Darussalam. 13

APPENDIX 3 | UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING AND LEARNING

VISION | “A first class international university, A distinctive national identity”



Source: The UBD's Strategic Plan 2006-2015 Summary Report. 2005. Universiti Brunei Darussalam; Brunei Darussalam. 15

**APPENDIX 4 | THE UBD'S ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGY MAP**

