

Chapter 10

Processes for Strategic Planning in Vietnam's Higher Education System

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Introduction

Strategic planning for higher education is a recent activity in Vietnam. National development policies and strategies for education have been formalized on many occasions since 1946, but it was not until 1982 that higher education was overtly incorporated into a national policy and strategy for education. The provisions agreed to at that time were, however, concerned primarily with issues of short-term governance and the resourcing of higher education, rather than with establishing a strategic direction and attendant policy. The notion of a 'strategy' for higher education in Vietnam focused repeatedly on annual administrative and training plans at the institutional level – a situation that continued until 2001 when, for the first time, there was an overt connection established between the development of a network of 'quality' universities and the socio-economic development and the regional and global competitiveness of the nation. The government's commitment to a transformation of higher education has been strong since then and has been underpinned by ambitious goals for the higher education system. The government's enthusiasm for addressing the quality and productivity of the system has been driven by a genuine desire to significantly improve the professional capability and quality of life of the Vietnamese people as quickly and effectively as possible. However, enthusiasm of this nature that is not harnessed by strong and relevant strategy rarely achieves success. Therein lies the current threat for Vietnam.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a disciplined process that seeks to formalize a medium- to long-term direction for a system or institution. The ultimate purpose of this planning in the context of higher education is to improve the contribution of the university sector

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to the economic and social capacity and performance of the nation and to maximize work and life opportunities for students.

Central to the concept of a strategic plan is the notion of change and the application of creative thinking. A plan for the future that does not embrace a desire to change structures, processes, roles and attitudes in a constructive and innovative manner in order to improve performance, quality and relevance is little more than a business management plan. In a world of rapid, pervasive and fundamental change characterized by an exponential growth in the use of information technology and escalating competition on a global scale, strategy – to paraphrase Tom Peters – is everything.

Particularly in a developing country such as Vietnam, strategic planning in higher education is also about leadership. If Vietnam is to position itself as a major player in both the regional and global economies, and if the social and economic well-being of its people is to be improved, then much will depend on the strategic capacity of its higher education system. The higher education system will be expected to lead the way in relevant high-level research, and it will be expected to provide the innovative and highly skilled graduates to lead Vietnam's major industries, professions and developmental projects. Effective strategic planning is the mechanism that will allow the higher education system in Vietnam to deliver on its critical leadership role for the country.

Strategic plans typically involve at least five components: a clear and articulated vision of how the system or institution will be positioned in the future; a set of goals or objectives necessary to attain the vision; a set of processes and tactics for achieving each of the goals or objectives; a plan for identifying and providing the resources necessary to implement those processes; and a mechanism for providing regular constructive feedback on progress towards the attainment of the goals.

The Vision for Higher Education in Vietnam

In 2005, the Vietnamese government released its Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) for the period from 2006 to 2020.¹ HERA identifies a desire to make major improvements to the higher education system by 2020 as a vehicle for harnessing the intellectual potential of the Vietnamese people. The attendant strategy document is titled *The Substantial and Comprehensive Renewal of Vietnam's Higher Education in the 2006–2010 Period* and suggests that the reform agenda will

substantially and comprehensively renew higher education and make substantial changes in quality, efficiency and scale in order to meet the requirements from national industrialization and modernization, international economic integration and people's learning demands.

This statement is, however, a statement of goal, and not a statement of strategic vision. It identifies, at a very high level of aggregation, some changes that will be pursued, but does not make explicit how the higher education system will be

¹ Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated 2 November 2005.

positioned in 2020 and, in simple terms, what it will look like, and what it will be doing, and why. The closest that the document comes to a clear vision statement is a single, vague sentence:

By 2020, Vietnam's tertiary education shall attain the regional advanced standards, approach the world's advanced level, be competitive and suit the socialist-oriented market mechanism.

Hayden and Lam (2006: 11), who have analysed the HERA documentation in depth, have synthesized from the text a somewhat more comprehensive understanding of the vision for higher education in Vietnam:

In broad outline, the higher education reform agenda envisages a system that by 2020 is three to four times larger than at present, better managed and better integrated, more flexible in providing opportunities for course transfer, more equitable, more financially self-reliant, more research oriented, more focused on the commercialization of research and training opportunities, more attuned to international benchmarks of quality, and more open to international engagement.

Four key issues arise from available statements relating to a vision for higher education in Vietnam. First, the existing 'vision' is detail-poor, and as a consequence provides a nebulous target towards which to aim. Further, HERA does not provide a comprehensive vision for higher education, but rather identifies some individual elements, each of which would seem meritorious and each of which possibly contributes to a vision, but which collectively only convey part of the picture. There is also no indication regarding how those elements are meant to interact in order to contribute to an integrated and holistic vision for higher education. The lack of a clear and comprehensive vision – the mental picture of an efficient and effective future higher education system – has profound consequences for the other elements of the strategic planning process, because if the vision is not clear, then the goals, implementation processes, resourcing considerations and review mechanisms that flow from that vision will necessarily also lack precision. It is hard to hit the bull's-eye if the target is shrouded in mist!

Second, there is little evidence that the vision for the future of higher education in Vietnam has emerged from a rigorous strategic and competitive analysis of the current and emerging internal and external environments of both the country and the sector. Such an analysis is essential for many reasons: it establishes what is necessary and desirable; it confirms what is realistic and possible (given a range of social, cultural, economic and educational opportunities and constraints); it highlights how higher education can promote the future development of the country and, in turn, it shows how the future development of the country can be a catalyst for the development of the higher education system; it provides insights into strategic alliances and networks that may be needed; it can unearth new markets or market mechanisms; and it identifies what structural, procedural and attitudinal changes may be needed in order to progress.

Third, it is difficult to ascertain just how the vision – for all its shortcomings – was developed. There is little transparency regarding who was involved in developing the strategy, who was consulted and what the actual consultation process was. The vision has been communicated in official documents and directives in an essentially

'top down' manner, without any of this explanation. The problem that arises here is one of ownership. If those who ultimately are required to implement the Reform Agenda (such as academic staff, administrators and students in the universities) have not had input to the development of the vision, and do not have knowledge of how the vision was developed, or by whom, or why, then it is unlikely that they will have a high level of commitment to its implementation, particularly if they do not fully agree with it.

Fourth, the vision as currently articulated says very little about the needs of either students or teachers in the higher education system, or about the learning environment. Quite simply, irrespective of the best intentions by the government, Vietnam will find it difficult to deliver high-quality research and high-quality student outcomes from its universities unless the learning and teaching processes, resources and general environment of those universities are of the highest possible standard. A comprehensive and appropriate vision for the future of higher education in Vietnam must include these aspects if the university sector and the country generally are to realize their potential.

Objectives for the Higher Education System

HERA contained 32 concrete objectives for the higher education system in Vietnam for the period 2006–2020. These objectives are remarkably comprehensive, targeting all aspects of the system. They vary significantly, however, in their level of specificity, with some being extremely precise and others exhibiting marked ambiguity.

Key areas addressed by the objectives include the following:

- the establishment of a national network of universities and colleges, classified according to their functions and training focus, and with cooperation and collaboration as a characteristic;
- institutional autonomy for public higher education institutions, including the withdrawal of line-ministry control, providing them with 'the right to decide and be responsible for training, research, human resource management and budget planning';
- expansion of non-public (private) higher education institutions, with that sector to account for 30 per cent of all higher education enrolments by 2010 and 40 per cent by 2020;
- diversification and escalation of institutional revenue activities, particularly through increased contract services and the commercialization of scientific, technological, production and service provision – the target is that 15 per cent of the total revenue for tertiary education institutions by 2010, and 25 per cent by 2020, will come from entrepreneurial activity;
- establishment of a national system of quality assurance and accreditation for higher education;

- an increased focus on research and research training;
- increased higher education enrolments – the target is to increase the number of students in higher education to 200 students per 10,000 population by 2010 and to 450 students per 10,000 population by 2020. Further, targets have been set to increase the number of students enrolled in master's-level and doctoral degrees;
- improved levels of qualification for academic staff in universities, with specific targets that by 2010 as many as 40 per cent of lecturers will have a master's-level qualification and 25 per cent will have a doctoral qualification, and that by 2020 as many as 60 per cent of lecturers will have a master's-level qualification and 35 per cent will have a doctoral qualification;
- an increased focus on scientific and technological aspects of the university curriculum; and
- the formulation of a higher education law, with a view of bringing together into a single document the range of decrees, constitutions and policies currently impacting the system.

These objectives are, individually and collectively, worthy goals for the higher education system and the nation. However, for a country that is starting from such a low resource and infrastructure base (it must be remembered that Vietnam was only unified in 1975 following an extended period of warfare and social upheaval), the set of objectives would seem somewhat ambitious. Indeed, to a large extent, the objectives appear to be more of a wish list than a set of integrated goals tempered by reality and integrated by strategy. It is difficult to find confidence that Vietnam has the human and financial resource capacity to deliver the stated objectives within the proposed timelines.

Once again, there is little transparency regarding how the objectives were developed or endorsed, and there is little evidence that they have resulted from a rigorous analysis of the internal and external environments. Lack of ownership may not, however, be the problem here, because, intuitively, many of the objectives are likely to be appealing to institutions and staff, particularly those objectives that seek to increase institutional and academic autonomy. The real problem may be the raising of expectations that cannot be fulfilled and the frustration and de-motivation that can flow from the dissonance. There would appear to be a strong argument for Vietnam to temper its ambitious programme of reform and to be more patient and more strategic about positioning the country for the future. In particular, there would appear to be considerable advantage in the country revisiting the set of objectives for higher education with a view to setting a smaller number of more achievable objectives, linked to more conservative targets and realistic timelines.

Processes for Implementing the Objectives

The big gap in Vietnam's HERA is the lack of any detailed explanations or suggestions regarding how the 32 specific reform objectives are to be implemented. The documentation accompanying HERA is quite detailed concerning the rationale for

the objectives, but is remarkably silent about their implementation, as indeed is the 2005 Education Law which provides regulations to support HERA but which does not provide any clear indication of the processes to be employed for implementing a strategy.

To a large extent, the lack of clear processes for implementing the higher education strategy is to be expected, given issues associated with the strategic vision and objectives, as discussed above, and given also some difficult resourcing and quality assurance issues. If, as is the case in Vietnam, the objectives are overly optimistic – if they are beyond the financial and intellectual and skills resources of the country, at least in terms of the accompanying timelines – then it simply is not possible to construct authentic processes for achieving those objectives. Further, without a clearly defined plan for implementing the Reform Agenda, and without a clear understanding of what needs to be done and what human and physical resources will be needed, it is not possible to make the informed budgetary decisions necessary to support and promote strategic change.

The danger is that without clearly defined processes for implementing the objectives, there will be no substantial and coordinated progress. Improvements that do occur are more likely to be ad hoc rather than strategic. A plan for implementing objectives – at least at the level of identifying the steps to be taken, when and by whom – is central to any effective strategic planning process. The fact that there are no clearly identifiable processes for implementing the objectives, and indeed no strong sense at all regarding what those processes might be, highlights significant weaknesses in the development and potential implementation of the Reform Agenda for higher education in Vietnam. It is reasonable to assert that the lack of attention to implementation planning is, more broadly, a characteristic of all facets of public life in Vietnam and reflects in large part a serious lack of expertise in this area across the country.

Resourcing the Strategic Plan

In December 2007, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Training, Dr Nguyen Thien Nhan, reported on Vietnam's limited economic capacity in relation to education.² He reported that average expenditure on higher education in 2007 was just under US \$400 per student per year. He observed also, however, that there was significant recent growth in both public and private educational expenditure. Public expenditure on education had increased from 4.2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2000 to 5.6 per cent in 2006, while total expenditure (public and private) had reached 7.5 per cent of GDP in 2006. Expenditure for kindergarten and general education, however, accounts for 71 per cent of the total education budget, with technical and higher education combined accounting for only 15 per cent of all expenditure.

² Paper presented at the Regional Higher Education Conference, Kuala Lumpur, December 2007.

Against this background, it seems clear that Vietnam simply does not have sufficient financial resources to implement HERA, as currently articulated, even if there were to be more clarity about the implementation processes. Quality cannot be delivered with severely restricted resources, particularly when the Reform Agenda requires not only very significant improvements in the quality of higher education delivered and in the quality of graduate outcomes, but also a very significant growth in the number of students and academic staff. Significant additional funding has been sought and obtained from organizations such as The World Bank, The Asian Development Bank and the Ford Foundation, but these organizations tend to provide a short-term safety net to assist development rather than long-term solutions. Further, funds from external sources generally have strict guidelines for expenditure and accountability. Restrictions on expenditure are likely to constrain to some extent Vietnam's capacity to pursue exclusively the attainment of objectives that it alone has determined to be of high priority.

As a consequence, it becomes necessary for Vietnam to attract significantly increased funding from the nation's private sector. According to Dr Nguyen Thien Nhan, private sector expenditure has more than doubled since 2000. In terms of relative expenditure on education, however, the importance of private expenditure has declined, from 28.5 per cent of all expenditure in 2000 to 25 per cent of all expenditure in 2006. The reality is that the financial resources of the Vietnamese private sector are also very limited, and are already very stretched, which makes the objective of increasing private sector enrolments to 30 per cent by 2010 and 40 per cent by 2020, highly problematic, particularly as there is no clearly articulated plan for achieving this outcome.

Another consequence of limited government finances is that Vietnam's higher education institutions will have to significantly diversify and expand their commercial revenue-generation activities, particularly through increased contract services and the commercialization of scientific, technological, production and service provision. This is a clearly stated objective of HERA, with associated targets for the system of 15 per cent of total revenue from institution-based entrepreneurial activity by 2010 and 25 per cent by 2020. This strategy for increasing revenue is, however, significantly constrained by the current dearth of quality academic staff, and quality research and development, in Vietnamese universities. Dr Nguyen Thien Nhan openly admitted in his Kuala Lumpur address that Vietnamese academics and university graduates generally are of poor quality when compared to other nations in the region and that the level of research and technological development in Vietnam still rates well behind most of its international competitors. Dr Nguyen cited the example of three international companies willing to invest over US \$2 billion in Vietnam, but needing over 3,000 engineers that cannot be provided at the required standard through the Vietnamese higher education system.

The increased commercial focus for higher education raises the difficult issue of how to go about significantly improving the quality of academic staff in Vietnam's higher education institutions. If Vietnamese academics are to attain the international standards demanded by both HERA and the economic strategy for the country

generally, then staff of international standing must be attracted to Vietnam to train them, or high numbers of Vietnamese academics must be sent to quality overseas universities to undertake significant training in their disciplines. Neither solution is easy to implement, at least within a relatively short time frame. On the one hand, Vietnam simply does not have the money to support overseas training for the number of staff that would be necessary, and further, Vietnamese higher education institutions could not afford to be denuded of many of their best staff for a number of years while they were overseas improving their qualifications. On the other hand, Vietnam cannot afford to offer the employment packages necessary to attract the number of quality academics from other countries that would be necessary to leverage the improvements in academic standards required by the sector and the nation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that wages for university academics generally are significantly less than those paid to people in business with comparable qualifications. The dilemma of ensuring high-quality academic staff has not been addressed in any authentic way in strategic planning for the higher education sector in Vietnam. Unless it is, very few of the 32 objectives in HERA have a strong chance of success.

The lack of international standard infrastructure to support learning and research is another significant and problematic issue for Vietnam's strategic plans for its higher education system. By international standards, facilities in most universities do not provide attractive environments for learning: most of the equipment for teaching and research is inadequate and antiquated, libraries are poorly stocked, curriculum documents are in desperate need of revision, information technology systems lack reliability and are not always accessible and research funds are limited. The strategic plan acknowledges these issues, but offers no plan for resourcing improvement.

In summary, then, strategic plans for the higher education system in Vietnam lack a clear and realistic resource strategy. It must be recognized, however, that without a clear articulation not only of what is to be achieved but also of how it is to be achieved, it is not possible to resource appropriately or adequately the objectives and attendant initiatives of the system. On the other hand, without a sense of what funds might be available, it is difficult to construct a realistic set of attainable objectives. Indeed, given the severe limitations on available funding, it is clear that the HERA contains too many objectives seeking to achieve too many unattainable targets within too many unrealistic timelines. This problem reflects the poor strategic planning processes and procedures.

Mechanisms for Assessing Progress

The process of strategic planning includes the development of mechanisms for assessing progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives. These mechanisms provide feedback to both policy makers and practitioners regarding how effectively the processes for implementing desired objectives are working, and allow modifications to policy and practice to be made in the light of the information

collected. The mechanisms also provide public accountability for the appropriate and effective expenditure of funds, particularly those coming from public or donor agencies. Further, the assessment mechanisms associated with strategic planning allow individual institutions to compare their performance against other institutions and the system as a whole, and thus to target areas for improvement.

There is no evidence that a substantive system of review has been established specifically to provide feedback on the effective and efficient implementation of HERA in Vietnam. A system for the regular collection of performance information at both the institution and system levels does exist in Vietnam, and it would seem that the intention is to use this existing performance evaluation framework to provide feedback regarding the implementation of HERA. Making inferences about strategic progress on the basis of information not specifically developed for that purpose is, however, fraught with dangers regarding the integrity of the information and the validity of subsequent interpretations.

There are significant concerns regarding the current collection of performance data for use in strategic planning for the higher education system in Vietnam. Smith (2005) identified these concerns as follows:

- There is little evidence to indicate that the data collection, analysis and reporting processes for higher education in Vietnam reflect a clearly conceptualized plan for addressing the critical information needs of the system. Rather, the current approach appears to be to collect as much information on as many aspects of the system as possible and to publish the results.
- Information collection, analysis and reporting processes for higher education in Vietnam do not facilitate or support trend analyses. Trend analyses are extremely important tools for strategic planning because they assist decision makers and practitioners to predict future situations and to assess the potential impact or effectiveness of particular initiatives or events. Nevertheless, rigorous trend analyses are not currently possible for the Vietnamese higher education system because statistics collected across time are not always specified in the same way and are not always collected and analysed according to similar parameters; that is, current data collection and analysis methods do not legitimately allow 'apples to be compared with apples'.
- Major strategic decisions are being made on the assumption that statistical analyses, inferences and conclusions are valid and accurate, when the reality is that the underpinning data resources frequently are insufficient or of suspect validity.
- Currently, there are at least four different agencies, each with its own way of collecting data, together with all of the higher education institutions themselves, collecting data on the higher education system in Vietnam. The potential for statistical error is, as a consequence, very high.
- Significant difficulties exist with respect to the reliability, timeliness and accuracy of data collection because of issues linked to the quality and reliability of information technology systems for higher education.
- Little information is collected from students regarding the quality of the teaching, learning support and learning environment they experience during their studies.

- It is difficult for system and institutional administrators and decision makers to access relevant and timely information. In particular, it is difficult to identify where information is held, who holds it and what protocols are necessary to access it. These difficulties do not appear to be linked to any deliberate attempt to obstruct access to the data, but rather are a reflection of totally inadequate data storage and retrieval mechanisms.

Regional Comparisons

Other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Thailand and Singapore, have faced similar issues and imperatives to Vietnam regarding higher education reform. These countries have, however, taken somewhat different approaches to strategic planning for their higher education systems.

Thailand, a kingdom of over 65 million people, with a recent history of significant political unrest, has over two million higher education students, many of which are in sub-degree institutions such as community and vocational education colleges. Currently, there are 123 'degree level institutions' (universities) in Thailand. In similar vein to Vietnam, the Thai government is strongly focussed on significantly improving the professional capability of the Thai people as a way of leveraging the economic productivity and competitiveness of the nation. As with Vietnam, however, the higher education system currently has neither the capacity nor the capability to respond to the social and economic needs of a rapidly developing nation. Expenditure on higher education is around 15 per cent of the total education budget – about the same as in Vietnam. Major issues of concern confronting the higher education system in Thailand include the following:

lack of unity in policy, goals and direction representing a succinct overall picture; absence of a strong and effective state system/mechanism to monitor and evaluate performance; lack of a mechanism to support and assist institutions in initiating and developing innovations; . . . a lack of flexibility and efficiency; and the absence of cooperation within and outside the institutions (OEC, 2007: 7).

These concerns are very similar to those confronting the higher education system in Vietnam.

In December 2002, the Thai government established an Education Reform Steering Committee (ESRC), with the deputy prime minister as Chair. The primary purpose of the ERSC with respect to higher education is to develop and continuously review the strategy for higher education reform in Thailand. The Committee is supported by a number of task forces, the major responsibility of which is to provide information to assist the development and review of strategy. Feedback from stakeholders at all levels is part of the information collected by the task forces. Detailed strategic plans currently exist and are being enacted across the following areas: structural reform of universities; administrative and managerial systems; financing; staffing; student access; quality of teaching, learning and curriculum; research (with an emphasis on applied research); professional development; and

private sector participation. It is still too early to evaluate the success of these strategies, but it is noteworthy that although the context for higher education reform is similar in Thailand to Vietnam, the Thai government started its process of reform by developing and articulating a clear strategic plan detailing how objectives are to be implemented and resourced, and addressing key issues such as staff capacity and quality of teaching. There are also clearly established mechanisms for providing timely feedback on performance.

Singapore consists of 64 islands with a total area of just 1,000 square kilometres, but with a population approaching 5 million. At the time of its independence from Britain in 1965, Singapore was characterized by very high unemployment, high levels of poverty and a workforce that generally had experienced little quality education. Within 40 years, Singapore has transformed itself into what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now identifies as being an advanced economy. It has achieved this outcome largely through its investment in its education system, particularly its higher education system. The Singaporean government recognized at a very early stage that the only real resource the country possessed to drive economic and social growth was the quality and capacity of its human capital, and thus a strategic decision was taken to invest heavily in education and vocational training. The vision for Singapore was that, through its education strategy, it would 'develop a knowledge-based economy which will transform it into a global hub of knowledge-driven industries with world-class capabilities' (Sanderson, 2002: 94). Detailed strategic plans for the higher education system were developed and implemented, aided by the capacity of the government to exercise influence at all levels of activity.

The transformation of higher education in Singapore was underpinned by a number of powerful and arguably innovative strategic decisions. First, English was established as the major language of commerce, technology, administration and the workplace because it was considered fundamental to the successful engagement of Singapore and its people in international education and business. Second, an international advisory panel was established in 1997 to advise on processes for transforming the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) into world-class universities. As part of the transformation, the Singaporean government directed significant funds towards the recruitment of scholars and researchers of high international standing to these universities, and it changed the focus of learning and teaching from the transmission of knowledge to the development of critical and innovative thinking. Third, scholarships were provided to assist and encourage students to earn degrees from prestigious foreign universities. Fourth, subsidies (currently of around S\$130 million) were introduced to encourage overseas students to study in Singapore, but with the interesting feature that all overseas students studying under subsidy in Singapore were 'bonded' to work and contribute to the economic growth of Singapore for a period of three years upon completion of their study. Fifth, the Singaporean government negotiated with a number of the world's leading universities, including Harvard University and the Johns Hopkins Medical School, to establish centres of excellence in Singapore in scholarship and research, with partnership arrangements with both Singapore universities and industry.

The comparisons with Thailand and Singapore, both countries that faced similar contextual challenges and opportunities to those being faced by Vietnam, would seem to reaffirm the importance for Vietnam to develop and to disseminate a clearly articulated strategic vision for higher education, to think laterally and creatively about how to achieve that vision and to understand the centrality of appropriate human resource development to the economic and social future of the country.

Conclusion

The current strategic plan for higher education in Vietnam, HERA, which is intended to position the system for 2020, lacks a clear vision, involves a large number of overly ambitious objectives, provides little detail on how the objectives will be implemented or resourced and has no strong mechanism for providing timely and constructive feedback on performance. When the inadequacy of existing human and physical resources, administrative infrastructure, technology systems and available funding are added to the equation, it is very difficult to see how Vietnam will achieve the outcomes it is seeking to achieve from its higher education system, at least by 2020.

The Vietnamese higher education sector is, however, remarkable for its energy and enthusiasm, at both the system and institutional levels. The major difficulty is with the lack of rigour and process with respect to strategic planning, and it does not reflect the level of commitment nor the potential of the system to attain regional and even international standing. The government is simply trying to do too much too quickly, and it is trying to achieve significant outcomes without the benefit of a robust strategic planning process to guide decisions and activities, and without sufficient funds to support strategic objectives. Ambition and impatience are, in effect, overpowering reality.

Strategic planning is a disciplined and rigorous process, but it is not necessarily either a costly or a time-intensive process. It is a process that does and should allow access for stakeholders from all levels of the higher education system – the process itself actually creates ownership and commitment. The higher education system in Vietnam has enormous potential, in terms of both its own performance and its contribution to the nation. That potential will not be realized until there is a strong and realistic strategic plan for the future. Such a plan must focus quite strongly on the details of how reform can and will be implemented.

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