



Southern African Association for Institutional Research

Foundations of Institutional Research 2015

The strategic focus of institutional research



Presented by Herman Visser

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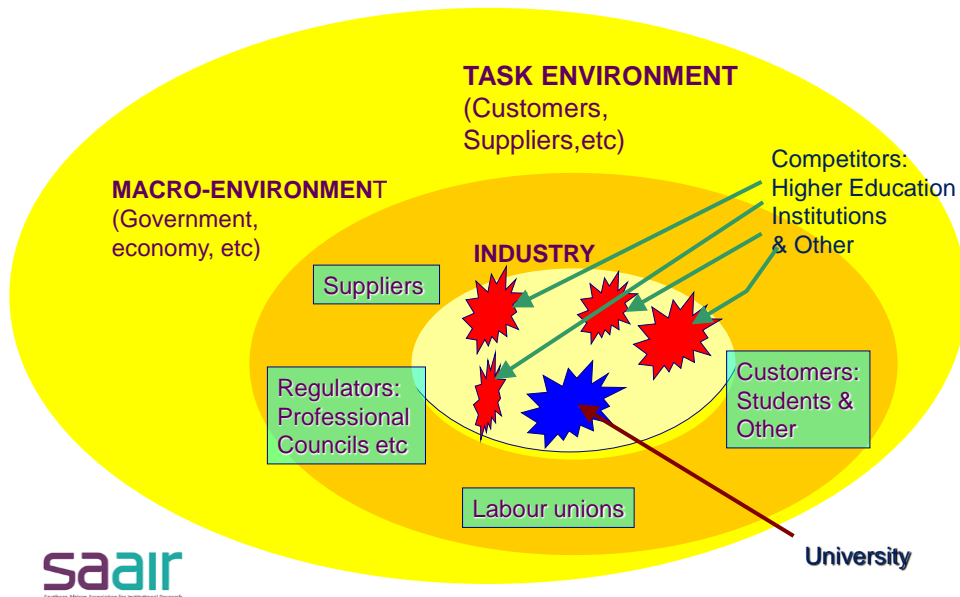
Purpose of this session

The purpose of this session is to **enhance the understanding about the strategic focus of institutional Research**. This is achieved by considering the **nature and importance of institutional research** and the **use of institutional research as a tool by higher education institutions in various aspects of strategic management**.

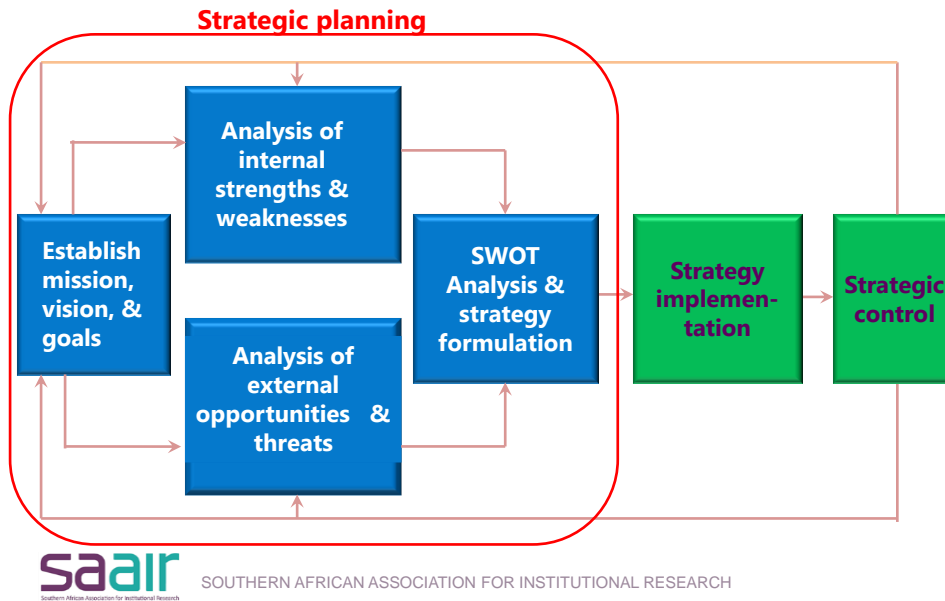


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External Environment



Strategic management process



Some well-known perspectives on Institutional Research

"An attitude of critical appraisal of all aspects of higher education, which has as its primary purpose the assessment and evaluation of the expressed goals of the institution and the means to achieve these goals" (Suslow, 1971)

An activity having "... to do with what decision makers need to know about an institution, its education objectives, goals and purposes, environmental factors, processes, and structures to more widely use its resources, more successfully attain its objectives and goals, and to demonstrate integrity and accountability in so doing" (Dressel, 1981)

Some well-known perspectives (Continued)

Research conducted within an institution of higher education to provide information which supports institutional planning, policy formation and decision making

(Saupe, 1990)

"Research leading to improved understanding, planning and operating of institutions of postsecondary education" and "to its utilization in planning, management and resource allocation to improve postsecondary education"

(Marvin W Peterson, 1999)



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Concept of Institutional Self-study

Self-study is about collective reflective practice carried out by a university with the intention of understanding better and improving its own progress towards its objectives, enhancing its institutional effectiveness, and both responding to and influencing positively the context in which it is operating

- Intimately linked to strategy, culture and decision-making
- Conceptually distinct from the related field of HE research in that it is undertaken to directly influence action

(Watkins & Madison, 2005)



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The 'Research' in Institutional Research

- Research is the systematic, rigorous inquiry with a view to describing and theoretically explaining phenomena, building and disseminating knowledge and solving problems
- With this in mind:
 - What is the relationship between IR and scholarship, knowledge production, theory, if any?
 - Is there any theory that underpins IR?
 - Does IR have disciplinary foundations?
 - Is it generalisable?



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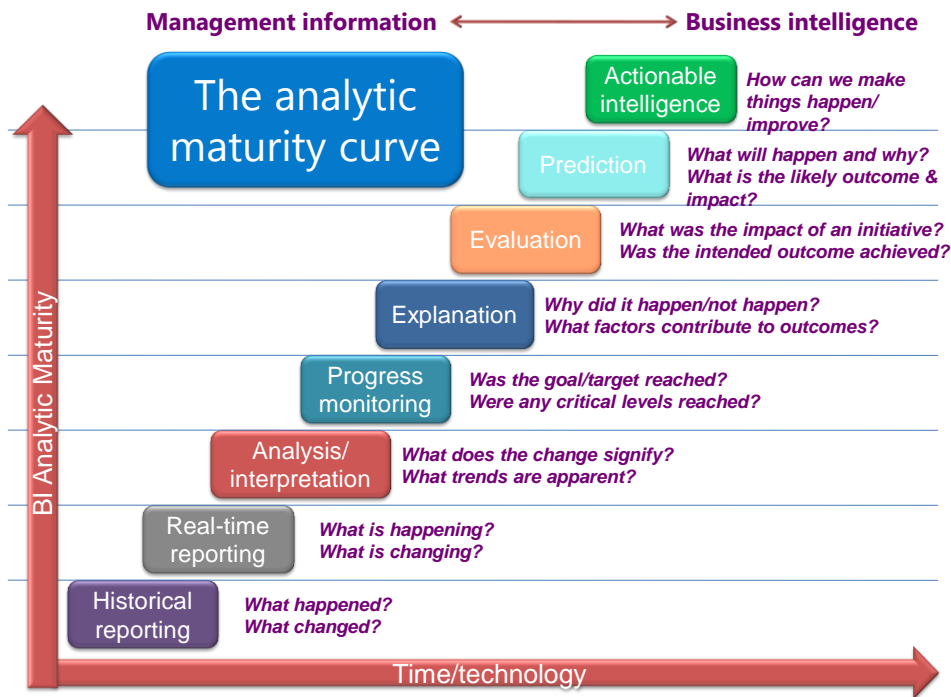
The 'Research' in IR (Continued)

Key distinctions:

- **Management Information (MI):** Structured quantitative, descriptive
- **Business Intelligence (BI):** Automated integrated enterprise-wide structured quantitative analytic
- **Institutional research (IR):** Structured & unstructured systematically analytic & explanatory
- **Knowledge management (KM):** systematic effort to capitalize on the cumulative knowledge of the institution
- Combined, this provides for **analytical maturity** and a **rich institutional data and information** (will come back to this later)



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The 'Institutional' in Institutional Research

- **External and internal sources:**
 - External environmental scanning, strategic analysis and comparative benchmarking a key element of broad definition of IR
- **Narrow and broad definition of internal stakeholders:**
 - Decision-makers (Council, Top management & Other)
 - All implementers of strategic and operational processes: integrated organisational and individual performance management

Areas of focus and interest

- **Enrolment management**
 - Number and profile of students to recruit & admit
 - Modelling and prediction; market analysis
- **Resource management**
 - Cost/Benefit Analysis
 - Improving operational efficiencies
- **Student success**
 - Persistence/retention
 - Teaching & Learning
 - Student experience/satisfaction
 - Learning analytics
- **Staff**
 - Salary and employment equity
 - Staff experience/satisfaction
- **Research**
- **Policy analysis & environmental scanning**
 - Comparative benchmarking
- **Monitoring and evaluation; impact assessment**
 - Employer and external stakeholder experience/satisfaction



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Business case for IR

- IR: reflective collective practice to improve institutional understanding, to support strategic goals and to improve competitive positioning
- IR matters: it supports organisational effectiveness in an increasingly competitive environment
- It should therefore form part of the Institution's management of strategy and risk



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Need for Institutional Research

- Quest for evidence-based policy making, planning & decision-making
- Changing role of information & intelligence in organisational life
- Shifting external environment & corresponding shifts in higher education management
- Accountability – external & statutory reporting, quality assurance & accreditation



Need for IR (Continued)

- Councils exerting pressure for comprehensive sets of indicators of performance and progress linked both to external benchmarks and internal objectives
- Growing recognition that understanding effectiveness needs to be linked to institutional planning and decision-making – the achievement of the objectives, comparing and contrasting departments/schools/faculties internally and externally



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Range of IR activities

- **Sourcing**
 - Internal
 - External (Environmental scanning, Comparative benchmarking)
 - Quantitative & qualitative
- **Processing**
 - Extraction/gathering of data
 - Aggregated organisation into quantitative MI (data warehousing)
 - Analytic formatting into Business Intelligence
- **Analysing & reporting via various outputs to various audiences**
 - Web/Portal
 - Narrative reports, briefings, presentations
 - Statutory reporting



Scope of IR

- Involves a systematic and systemic approach to information collection and analysis, covering all aspects of the University that pertain to mission, performance, decision-making and strategic change
- Has a strong technical component: how to measure and assess progress towards objectives and how to evaluate effectiveness



Range of methodologies

From its infancy, institutional researchers have used a broad range of methodologies from educational research, operations research, systems analysis, evaluation research, computer modeling, program budgeting, policy research, outcomes assessment, and planning models

Fincher, C, (1985). The art and science of institutional research. In MW Peterson and M Corcoran (Eds.), *Institutional research in transition*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc.



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Beyond reductionist quantification

- Danger of hooking into the routine consideration of quantifiable elements (*management by numbers*) without pursuing the more interesting and difficult questions about what makes performance change and improve (*explanations*)
- Complexity of relationship between research and decision making: Understanding strategic importance and supporting strategic management goes beyond merely understanding the institution in information terms (*Three tiers of organisational intelligence*)



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The Nature of Institutional Research

- Numerous useful definitions contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the nature of IR
- Some argue an overarching grand definition is not possible
- Key is to understand the context of '**research**' and '**institutional**'
- For our purpose - IR defined in terms of its purpose, scope & activities
- Narrow & broad definition and interpretation of IR in relation to: Management Information (MI), reporting, Business Intelligence (BI), planning, management
- If we accept a broad organisational purpose for IR and a broad range of activities as constituting IR, then we are committed to broad & integrated definition related to strategic management



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Purpose of Institutional Research

To provide intelligence and evidence-based support for management, decision making and planning in order to attain organisational strategic and operational goals

– Institutional research renders the organisation strategically intelligible to itself

Prof Narend Bajjnath
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Unisa

– To identify organisational weaknesses and obstacles to achieving objectives and efficiencies

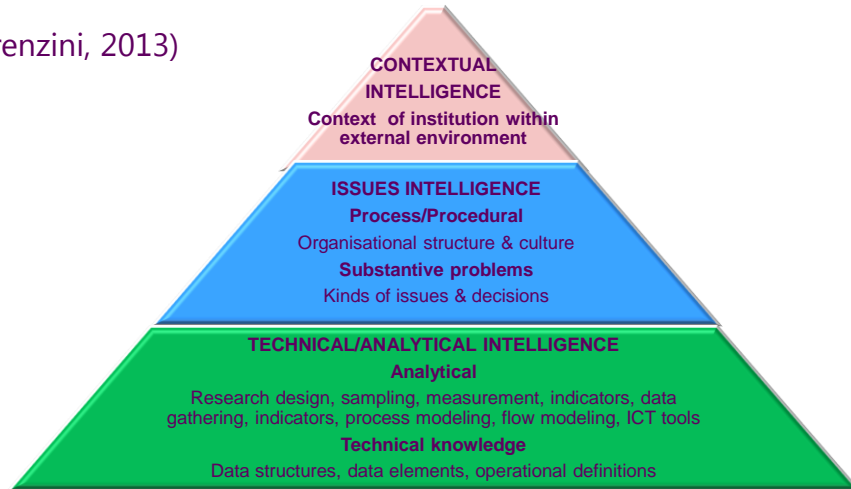
Dressel, 1981



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Terenzini's 3 tiers of organisational intelligence

(Terenzini, 2013)



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Are we asking the right questions?

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Changing context

- Shifts in HE context over last three decades
 - From self-governing community of scholars to regulated self-management
 - Neoliberal global political economy
 - New public accountability
 - Fiscal constraints
 - Marketisation, massification, internationalisation, globalisation
 - Hybridisation of institutional types, borderless provision
 - Competition & collaboration: corporate identity & branding
 - Use of ICT, also for teaching and support
 - Focus on analytics, including learning analytics



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Strategic position of knowledge-based innovation

The fact that the introduction of the innovation creates excitement, and attracts a host of others, means that the innovator has to be right the first time. He (*or she*) is unlikely to get a second chance.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Drucker

**If you get another chance,
it will be much more difficult to achieve success**



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Qualitative element

Vitally important qualitative element which can, without care, be relegated beneath the pseudo-scientism of management by spreadsheet

(Watson & Maddison, 2005)

Qualitative information is often used to enhance understanding that is crucial for organisational learning



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Key elements

- Understand internal & external context
- Appraise current practices
- Compare and benchmark against other practices
- Draw conclusions and design and implement initiatives to enhance practices
- Constitutes intrinsic component of action learning/Strategic Management cycle



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Action learning / Strategic Management cycle



Facilitating organisational learning

- Single and double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996)
- Taxonomy for organisational learning (Huber, 1991)
- Situated learning and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 2002)

Situated learning and communities of practice

- Knowledge management and business intelligence trends are associated with a view of institutional information as part of an ecosystem in which data and individuals using the data are constantly interacting and inseparable
- Situated learning theory → knowledge is dynamically constructed as we conceive of what is happening
- Information produced by institutional research (or other sources) become usable knowledge only when it is integrated into and processes by communities of practice or other social context



Key challenge actionable intelligence

- IR must be practical: **'actionable intelligence'**
- **Danger of commissioning and collecting vast amounts of information and then ignoring it**
- **Bridging the gap between research and policy very challenging**
- **'Red light' signals not sufficient – implications & consequences must be carefully analysed and communicated in appropriate forums in appropriate formats**



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Organisational learning

- Complex & contested
- Not benign & rational
- *“Strategy making is an immensely complex process involving the most sophisticated, subtle, and at times subconscious of human cognitive and social processes”* (Mintzberg, 2000)
- Implies **shift from** concentration on **technical to contextual intelligence** which **combines** the **analytical with** the **intuitive**
- Effective organisational learning often implies **organisational unlearning** → challenges of **change management**



Comprehensive view of IR

- IR comprises:
 - a range of activities & outputs
 - involving the systematic collection, organisation, analysis & dissemination of
 - relevant, accurate & timely
 - internal and external, structured and unstructured information and organisational/environmental intelligence
 - for the purpose of supporting strategic & operational management, planning & decision-making
 - in order to optimise performance and execute strategy and thereby attain institutional goals, outcomes & impacts



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IR: ‘Vision gathered from the promise of actual things’

All we can do is search the world as we find it, extricate the forces that seem to move it, and surround them with criticism and suggestion. Such a vision will inevitably reveal the bias of its author; that is to say it will be a human hypothesis not an oracular revelation. But if the hypothesis is honest and alive it should cast a little light upon our chaos. It should help us to cease revolving in the mere routine of the present or floating in a private utopia. For the vision of latent hope would be woven of vigorous strands; it would be concentrated on crucial points of contemporary life, made in a living zone where the present is passing into the future. It is the region where thought and action count. Too far ahead there is nothing but your dream; just behind there is nothing but your memory. But in the unfolding present man [sic] can be creative if his vision is gathered from the promise of actual things.

(Lippmann, 1914)



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Conclusion

- It should be evident that Institutional Research can be a useful tool for Tertiary Education Institutions to re-examine and re-align their vision, mission, goals and activities to realize their goals
- By applying a rich variety of information sources, it is possible to provide information that can inform strategic planning and decision-making
- Through monitoring and evaluation, understanding can be facilitated that can enhance organisational learning



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Questions / Discussion



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