

HUOM! Tämä on alkuperäisen artikkelin rinnakkaistallenne. Rinnakkaistallenne saattaa erota alkuperäisestä sivutukseltaan ja painoasultaan.

Käytä viittauksessa alkuperäistä lähdettä:

Vuori, Johanna (2016). Towards Strategic Actorhood? The Execution of Institutional Positioning Strategies at Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. *Higher Education Quarterly* 4(70), ss. 400–418.

PLEASE NOTE! This is an electronic self-archived version of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version:

Vuori, Johanna (2016). Towards Strategic Actorhood? The Execution of Institutional Positioning Strategies at Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. *Higher Education Quarterly* 4(70), pp. 400–418

The final publication is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12103>

DOI: 10.1111/hequ.12103

# **Towards Strategic Actorhood? The Execution of Institutional Positioning Strategies at Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences**

**Johanna Vuori, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, [johanna.vuori@haaga-helia.fi](mailto:johanna.vuori@haaga-helia.fi)**

## **Abstract**

Given the emerging interest in institutional positioning and to augment the small number of empirical studies in this field, this paper presents discussion about how Finnish universities of applied sciences implement their profiling strategies. The analysis is based on an examination of documents recently submitted by these institutions when reapplying for operating licences. The paper discusses how institutions refer to their positioning statements when introducing or responding to changes in their internal or external environments and questions whether positioning paves the way to strategic actorhood. The results suggest that the universities of applied sciences that most often refer to profiling statements have built different kinds of networks to support their positioning activities. Moreover, they have made considerable structural changes to implement their positioning strategies. The restructuring of human resource capacity required to execute the positioning strategy is discussed in the reapplication documents, albeit with a lesser emphasis.

**Keywords:** strategy execution, strategy implementation, institutional positioning, profiling, universities of applied sciences

## **Introduction**

The ability of a university to expand its role to that of a strategic actor has received a growing interest among organisational scholars. In the discussion on universities' 'strategic' or 'organisational' actorhood, researchers have emphasised a university's needs, opportunities and responsibilities for reaching its goals (Krücken and Meier, 2006) and its search for distinctiveness, rationality and hierarchy (Musselin, 2006). At the level of an individual university 'strategic actorhood refers to its willingness, processes and actions to build a better 'fit' between the university and its environment. This is a result of intertwined processes of external screening and internal sensemaking. (Pineiro & Stensaker, 2014a).

The shift from a traditional university to one that functions as a strategic actor has been characterised as a shift from a loosely-coupled to a tightly-coupled organisation or the transformation of a traditional university to an entrepreneurial university (de Boer et al., 2007; Pineiro and Stensaker, 2014a, b; Toma, 2012). Ramirez (2010) concludes that the transformation of a university to organisational actor took place in the US universities earlier than in other parts of the world.

Whitley (2008 and 2012) and Whitley and Gläser (2014) argue that the possibilities for universities to achieve strategic actorhood are restricted, claiming that 'at most, they could function like investment banks, allocating and managing resources amongst competing project teams' (Whitley, 2008, p. 24). Whitley (2008 and 2012) maintains that the opportunities for universities to act strategically are few because they have only a limited control over distinctive organisational capabilities. In other words, unlike private companies, universities cannot acquire, use and dismiss their labour force. In addition, they are unable to create unique university-specific, problem-solving routines and knowledge because scientific

discovery adheres to its own rules and procedures. Moreover, Whitley (2008, 2012) claims that university management cannot possess the expertise to manage or to evaluate research projects that fall outside their special field.

Strategic actorhood is also the central concept in the study of universities' institutional positioning and profile-building activities. Both theoretical and empirical research has been published in this emerging field of study (for example Berkeens et al., 2010; Coates et al., 2013; Fumasoli and Huisman, 2013; Fumasoli and Lepori, 2011; Klumpp et al., 2014; Laudel and Weyer, 2014; Silander and Haake, 2016). Universities' profiles are manifestations of their strategic actorhood. Through them they try to distinguish themselves from others and occupy more favourable niches in their environment (Fumasoli and Huisman, 2013).

The main body of literature on strategic actorhood and institutional positioning focuses on research universities (Klumpp et al., 2014; Laudel and Weyer, 2014; Meier and Schimank, 2010; Pietilä, 2014). Stensaker et al. (2014), however, claim that the strategic pathways of different types of institutions do not follow the same script. This paper aims to contribute to the study of strategic actorhood as it pertains to professionally-oriented higher education by focusing on the profile-building efforts of Finnish universities of applied sciences (UASs). Because of their the regional mission, focus on applied research and close links with labour markets UASs might be more prone to strategic actorhood than research universities.

Moreover, at least in Finland, UASs have been more eager to introduce managerialistic practices than research universities (Aarrevaara, Dobson and Pekkola, 2011.) Building the analysis on an examination of the operating licence applications submitted by Finnish universities of applied sciences in 2013, it discusses how these institutions refer to profile and priority-area definitions when they introduce changes in their internal or external environments. By examining whether the positioning actions of Finnish universities of applied sciences pave their way to strategic actorhood, it aims to further the international

discussion on the effects of the profile-building on the professionally-oriented side of binary higher education systems.

## **Profiles and priority areas**

According to van Vught and Huisman (2013, p. 27) an institutional profile displays ‘what the institution does, how good it is at it and how it compares to other institutions’. A well-known framework for university profiles is the U-map, which compares institutions with dimensions of student population, education, research, knowledge transfer, regional engagement and international orientation (U-map, 2015.) ‘Priority’, ‘focus’ or ‘core’ areas describe how universities have concentrated their research and education on areas that offer favourable conditions for survival and have fewer constraints (Fumasoli and Huisman, 2013). To accomplish this, some research areas must take priority over others. Laudel and Weyer (2014) in Germany and the Netherlands, as well as Silander and Haake (2016) in Sweden, have provided case studies which illustrate how both top-down and bottom-up forces affect the decision making that results in the research-profile determination.

## **Institutional profiling in Finland**

The institutional positioning efforts of Finnish higher education institutions were set in motion via the Finnish Education and Research 2007–2012 Development Plan. According to the plan, each higher education institution would ‘have a distinct profile in terms of teaching, research, links with working life and regional development’ (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34). Selected priority areas would support the endeavours of higher education institutions to find competitive research funding. Guided by this plan, the Ministry of Education, requested all higher education to present proposals for their institutional profiles and priority areas with respect to their performance agreements for the period of 2010–2012.

Universities of applied sciences were established in the early 1990s as teaching-oriented institutions offering professionally oriented bachelor’s degrees. Since 2003, they have

conducted research and development to correspond with the needs of business, industry and regional economy; beginning in 2005, they have offered master's degrees. Today, the 24 universities of applied sciences boast 138,000 degree students. Juridically UASs are limited companies, and as employers free to recruit and dismiss their personnel. Although strengthening in recent years, the research and development activities of universities of applied sciences constitute only 11% of the total staff hours (Vipunen, 2016).

The first versions of the profile definitions of universities of applied sciences demonstrated a wide scope of institutional interpretations of the concept of 'profile'. For the second time, they defined their profiles and priority areas for the performance agreements of the period 2013–2016. By this time, the definitions had become structurally more alike. (Vuori 2015a). The latest positioning statements were written for the operating licence applications in the autumn of 2013. The Ministry defined what it meant by 'profile and priority areas' as follows:

The profile defines the direction of a university of applied science's activities and its main cross-sectional strengths for the implementation of its mission.

The profile may emphasise education, research and development, life-long learning or the impact for region and working life in different ways. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, p. 4.)

Priority areas make the chosen profile concrete so there can only be a limited number of them and they cannot cover all activities. The priority areas can be seen as the spearheads of the activities of a university of applied sciences and relate to the region or educational fields. Priority areas distinguish the areas where a university of applied sciences aims to succeed in the long term and for

which it is willing to make investments using its basic resources. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013, p. 4.)

## **Strategy execution**

Compared to strategic planning, strategy execution is an operations-driven activity which is often considered more difficult than strategic planning. It is also less researched. (Hrebiniak, 2013; Noble, 1999; Rahimnia et al., 2009.)

There are several frameworks for strategy execution (for example, Hrebiniak, 2013; Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Thompson and Strickland, 1995; Waterman et al., 1980). As summarised by Okumus (2001), these frameworks cover 12 variables: environment, strategy formulation, organisational structure, leadership, organisational culture, operational planning, resource allocation, people, communication, control and feedback, outcome and external partner companies.

This paper discusses the fit between the strategy formulation as seen in definitions for institutional profiles and priority areas and four key factors: environment, organisational structure, people and strategic networks (Figure 1). These four relationships were chosen for the framework because of their centrality in strategy literature.

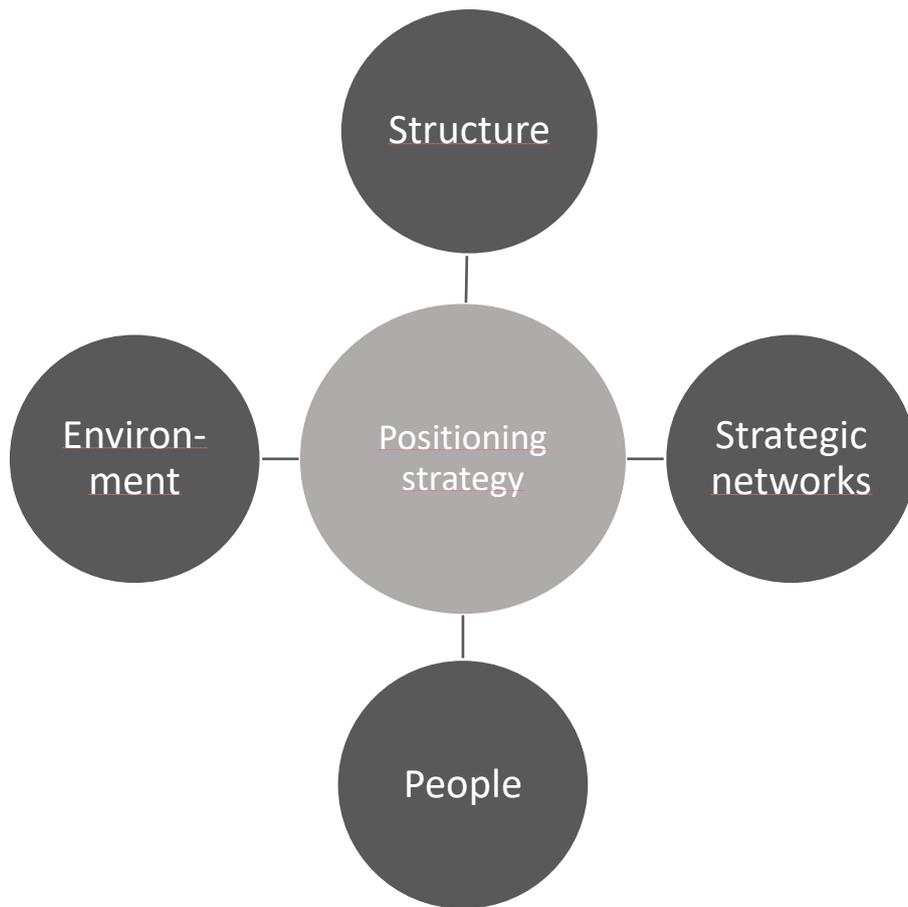


Figure 1. Analytic framework

The strategy literature accentuates the key relationships between the strategy and environment, structure, people and strategic networks. Strategy is essentially a manifestation of how the organisation positions itself in its environment in order to deal with it efficiently (Hrebiniak, 2013). Since Chandler's (1962) seminal work, *Strategy and Structure*, the fit between an organisation's strategy and its structure has been one of the most discussed relationships in the strategy literature and is still considered one of the major factors for the success of strategy execution (Hrebiniak, 2013). As Waterman et al. (1980, p. 24) note, people are strategically 'a pool of resources to be nurtured, developed, guarded and allocated'

and are very critical in people-based professional organisations (Hrebiniak, 2013) for building the competences and capabilities needed for implementing the strategy (Thompson and Strickland, 1995). Strategic networks are a ‘mode of organization that can be used by managers or entrepreneurs to position their firms in a stronger competitive stance’ (Jarillo, 1988, p. 32).

The extant empirical literature on higher education strategy strongly favours the studies on strategic planning rather than on strategic execution. In fact, one stream of these studies discusses the impeters of strategy implementation (Jiang and Carpenter, 2013; Rahimnia et al., 2005; Rahimnia et al., 2009; Shah and Nair, 2014). A research stream that approaches strategy implementation from a practical point of view focuses on the suitability of Kaplan and Norton’s (1996) balance scorecard framework in higher education strategy (for example, Kettunen, 2005; Philbin, 2011; Sayed, 2013).

The relationship between university strategy and environment has been recently examined by Pinheiro et al. (2015) who argue that it should not be seen as a simple mechanism of adaptation to a well-defined set of regional expectations, but a far more complex relationship which is constantly influenced by the changes in regulation and fluctuating resource dependencies. When discussing the characteristics of university competition, Deiacó, Holmén and McKelvey (2009) remind that the actions a university takes in the uncertainty of the environment cause more uncertainty. Universities need to take into account both national and regional contexts and regulative shifts. These are not always balanced which cause even more uncertainty in the environment. With their case study Dodgson and Staggs (2012) show how a successful university strategy implementation resulted from university leadership taking advantage of both national and regional policy conditions. Howells, Ramlogan and Cheng (2012) discuss the many paradoxes in university-industry collaboration and conclude that

there seems to be little or no difference between formal and informal relationships between the university and companies in regard to their effect on innovation.

The relationships of university strategy and internal structural arrangements and human resource policies have also been in the interest of higher education researchers. Pinheiro and Stensaker (2014a, 2014b) direct their attention to the relationship between university strategy and internal structure and demonstrate with a case study of a Danish university that universities' strategic actorhood of is manifested through efforts that aim at tightening the couplings of university's internal collaboration. Fumasoli (2015) examines the relationship between university strategy and people in flagship European research universities. Her study reveals that university personnel policies and human resource management practises are increasingly linked to strategies and profiles and reflected in the ways incentives, promotions, symbolic and material rewards are given. Mosey, Wright and Clarysse (2012) highlight the challenges of creating sustainable change in academic work practises in the execution of a new university strategy and suggest that promotion policies should be renewed to support a long-term change.

### **The licence-application texts as research material**

This paper is based on a documentary analysis of texts which the universities of applied sciences submitted to the Ministry of when they reapplied for operating licences in the autumn of 2013 in response to new legislation (Act 932/2014). These licence applications, which can be found on the Ministry's website (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015), offer lucrative data for researchers, as they contain information that may not be found elsewhere. They differ from strategic plan documents as they were written on a template which required the institutions to discuss their actions, not only plans. Therefore, while containing elements that could be classified rhetoric, much of the text refers to actions the

institutions have taken. Nevertheless, the researcher needs to keep in mind that the licence applications were produced for the express purpose of convincing the government that they should be granted the requested licence and therefore are inherently limited in scope and biased (Bowen, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2012). Moreover, although there was no page limit of the answers, the template on which the answers were given was standardised and thus directed the focus of writing on particular areas. These areas can be seen to reflect the interest of the ministry rather than the institutions.

The sampling was carried out in two consecutive stages. Firstly, of the 24 licence applications that were submitted to the Ministry, 17 were chosen by selecting those institutions that 1) operate in the three largest educational areas and that 2) offer both bachelor's and master's degrees and 3) operate in the Finnish language. The three largest educational fields are 'technology, communication and transport' (40,810 students in 2014), 'social services, health and sport' (39,149 students) and 'social sciences, business and administration' (28,732 students) (Vipunen, 2016). The licence applications were written on a template provided by the Ministry, which specified the following main chapters: basic information, the need for an operating licence, operational prerequisites, financial information, financial prerequisites, facilities and support services available, organisation of student services and administration and main rationale for the licence. The documents of the 17 institutions consisted of 16–48 pages, 29 pages on average.

The coding was performed using the categories derived from the chosen analytical framework (Figure 1): a) environment; b) structure; c) people and d) strategic networks. The coding unit could be a sentence, a part of a sentence or a larger piece of text referring to institutional profiles or to priority areas. These categories included all parts of the text in which profiles or priority areas were discussed, with the exception of those areas and instances in which the term 'profile' was used in another sense, such as describing profiles

for specific degree programmes (for example, the profile of nursing education is ‘health coaching’).

The second cycle of sampling was completed by selecting the six documents that were most densely coded and which related to the analytical frame as they were considered to represent the cases that had most profoundly established the link between positioning choices and the execution of strategy. This selection was made by comparing the coding percentages in Nvivo. The density of coding among these six institutions ranged from 3.46 to 9.64, while the coding density within the sample of 17 institutions of the first cycle ranged from 0.16 to 9.64.

These institutions were regional small or medium-sized universities of applied sciences (minimum 3,088 students, maximum 7,660 students). These six institutions had specified one to four items in their profile statements and named three to five priority areas. The profile statements referred to pedagogics, research and development, internationalisation, entrepreneurship, specialisations in chosen subjects or geographical locations. The priority area definitions referred to specific subject or field of education (such as ‘sustainable bio economy’, ‘steel construction’), to a combination of two educational fields (such as ‘the digitalisation of everyday services and industry’, ‘well-being and business services’) or to the geographical location of the region. (For more detail, see Appendix 1.)

In the following section, the licence application texts of these six case-institutions will be examined by discussing the relationship between their strategies as related to environment, structure, people and strategic networks. From this point forward, the six universities of applied sciences will be referred to as ‘the Profiling Six’. The quotations of their licence application texts in the following section will be marked as UAS1–UAS6 and are translations from the Finnish language.

## **Executing positioning strategy**

### **Environment**

The Profiling Six described the fit between their positioning strategy and environment by accentuating their strengths and describing how these strengths would create opportunities in the environment. They used their institutional strengths as justification for selecting their profiles and priority areas. Most often, the strengths related to their accomplishments in the region, their reputations and their established networks with regional players and enterprises. In addition, the Profiling Six referred to the opportunities that would arise as a result of their selections of particular profiling areas and which emphasised the benefits of improved economic prosperity for the region and of creating new mechanisms for university–business cooperation:

Priority areas will foster the restructuring of industries in the region. (UAS5)

Development of environmental technology solutions, bio economy competence [...] and improvement of energy efficiency [...] provide opportunities of the development of environmental business. (UAS6)

To justify the selection of their profiles, the Profiling Six featured strengths and opportunities, as well as threats and weaknesses, which, based on the sample, consisted of environmental characteristics, such as weak economic or demographic conditions in the region. The argumentation built a link between the weaknesses in the environment and the profiling strategy while claiming that the profile or priority area would offer an opportunity for the region to survive these challenges.

The age structure of [...] and the below than average level of the inhabitants support the lifelong learning profile chosen by the university of applied sciences. (UAS2)

A strategic institution does not only adapt to its environment but acts to shape it in order to achieve a more positive future. The relationships the Profiling Six claimed to have built between themselves and their environments was manifestly a strategic one, as they did not only describe the best fit between their chosen positioning strategies and environmental characteristics but were also using the positioning strategies to change their environments.

### **Structure**

The Profiling Six attempted to achieve a strong teaching–research nexus in their priority areas. The licence application texts exemplify that this was to be accomplished by putting more emphasis on the research and development in priority areas and by establishing new research centres, labs and teams. For example:

Research units that will serve the employers and teaching will be constructed around the sharpened priority areas. [...] Research units will be large enough to ensure quality of operations and they are capable of taking more challenging tasks than before. Research units will build deep operational and trusting relationships with the employers in the region. The financing of the research units comes partly from basic funding, but the core of the mission is to multiply project funding. (UAS4)

Research, development and innovation cooperation (profile and priority area teams) in the lines of the new organisational structure has been launched. (UAS6)

Due to the strengthening operations of the priority area it is important to invest in a new kind of open [...] infrastructure in order to create a new

environment for demonstrating, experimenting and displaying which can be genuinely opened for all actors of the ecosystem and can also be utilised in teaching. (UAS2)

Since the Profiling Six stressed the idea that the restructuring of the research-and-development function does not take place at the expense of teaching, the texts indicate a strong attempt by them to achieve a teaching–research nexus in the priority areas. Moreover, the universities sought to establish joint structures and facilities for research and development in cooperation with other regional and business players.

In an operational way the workshop and studio facilities of [...] gather actors in the same field together to do project co–operation. (UAS3)

[...] lab will be developed together with the city of [...] and the industry of the region and will be renewed mainly through project funding. (UAS2)

## **People**

As pointed out by Whitley (2008, 2012), one of the key challenges of a university’s strategic actorhood lies in its limited possibilities to recruit and to dispose of personnel that are not considered to be essential for its chosen strategy. The Profiling Six described capacity-building to some extent, but not as strongly as their fit between the environment, structure and networks. The human resources needed for the execution of a positioning strategy were planned to be acquired, for example, through personnel restructuring, by appointing new principal lecturers in priority areas and by training the current academic staff. Moreover, the texts revealed institutional plans to purchase short-term academic resources

from outside and also to use existing networks to build the needed competences. One of the Profiling Six, for example, intended to use the existing networks with foreign partner institutions so that the more experienced researchers in the network would mentor the novice Finnish researchers in the cooperative projects. In general, the capacity of the building plans of the individual institutions comprising the Profiling Six differed from each other and would not have emerged as a strong theme in a content analysis of the documents if the chosen framework had not directed attention to them.

### **Strategic networks**

The extensive emphasis on building external networks was strongly portrayed in the licence application texts of the Profiling Six. They had established versatile networks with other universities of applied sciences, research universities and partnered with foreign higher education institutions to cooperate in their priority areas. Moreover, networks with enterprises and enterprise coalitions, as well as with regional and municipal authorities and local organisations, were emphasised in the texts. The networking partners also included professional associations, science parks and, in some cases, secondary schools in the area.

In their texts, the Profiling Six described active participation in drafting regional and municipal strategies. Their active role in regional strategy formulation would strengthen the strategic role of the universities of applied sciences and, at best, create synergy between the positioning choices of the institution and the strategic spearheads of the municipality or the region.

The strategic priority areas have been chosen from the overlapping points of the core competence of [...] UAS and regional priority areas. (UAS1)

The priority areas of [...] are in line with the regional policy and strategies of [...] (UAS4)

Representatives of [...] participate in the drafting of Regional Policy 2014–2017. (UAS3)

### **From strategy to results?**

In order to examine the effectiveness of strategy implementation a further investigation was made regarding the outcomes of the Strategic Six in 2014. This was made by comparing the key performance indicators of the Profiling Six to their targets or national averages in a national database (Vipunen, 2016). This examination yielded no distinct pattern: four of these institutes had reached their target number of bachelor degrees, but only two their goal of master degrees. Moreover, only half of the institutions were better than average that year when the student credit point accumulation was measured. However, five of the six institutions were better than average when the staff publications were considered. The pattern in regards to external research funding was also random: half of the institutions had succeeded to gain more money in 2014 than in 2013, but half got less.

When evaluating the research, development and innovation activities of Finnish UASs in 2012, an international panel observed that in search of additional funding from the Academy of Finland, for example, the UASs need to compete with research universities and thus ‘become like their competitors’ (Maassen et al., 2012, p. 24). The examination of the funding structure of the Strategic Six revealed that funding from the Academy and EU framework programmes remains low while the funding sources with a strong focus on regional impact and teaching-research nexus play a much larger role.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined how Finnish universities of applied sciences discuss the relationship of their positioning strategies with respect to their environments, structure, people and strategic networks in their licence application texts. The findings, summarised in Figure 2, reveal that the fit between the strategy with regard to environment and to strategic networks was strongly emphasised in the application texts, and the relationship between the positioning strategy and structure was clearly demonstrated by accentuating the teaching–research nexus; however, the coverage of the relationship between the profiling strategy and people was weak and sketchy.

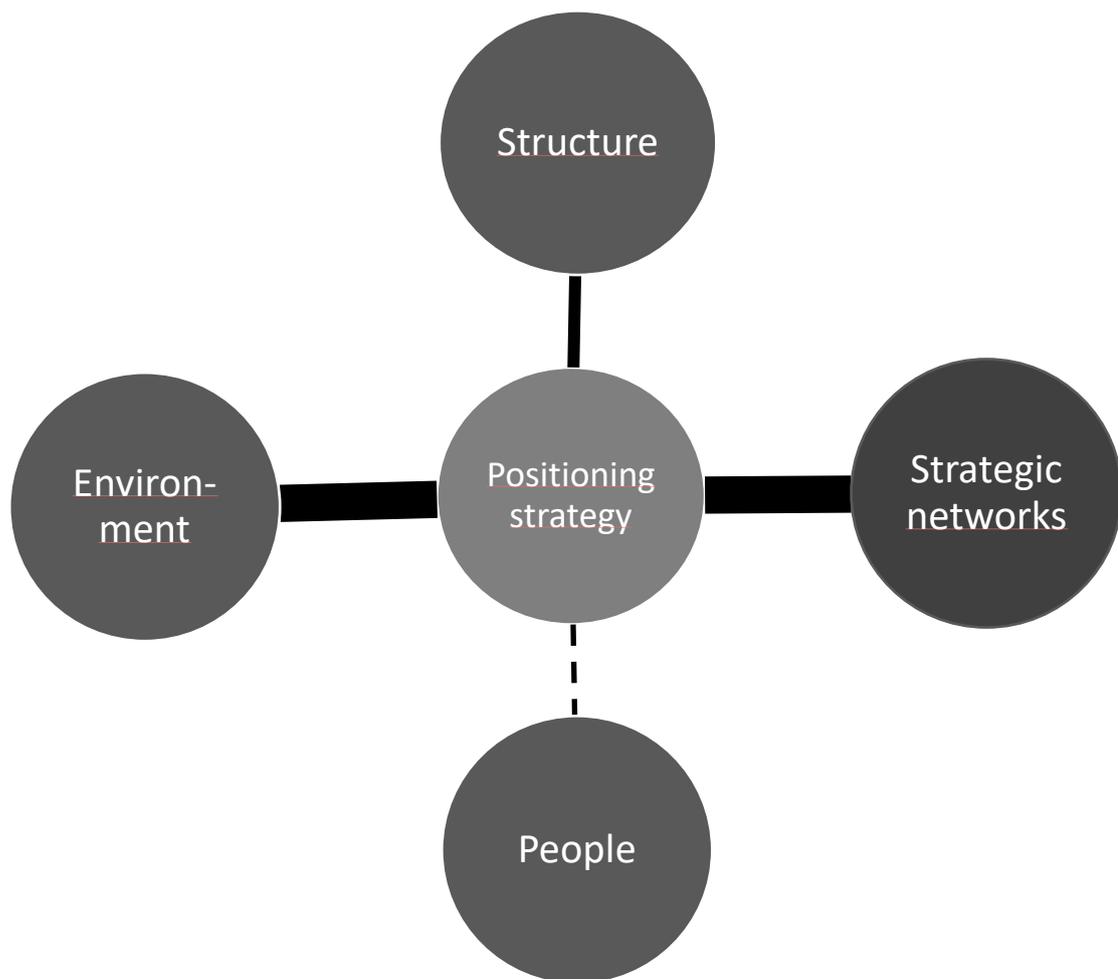


Figure 2. The strategy execution activities of the Profiling Six

Previous studies on positioning have concentrated on more traditional types of higher education institutions. Therefore, this study provided new insights into the strategic actorhood of institutions that represent the professionally-oriented side of the binary line and contributed to the discussion of the strategic relationship between a higher education institution and external environment (e.g. Pinheiro et al., 2015; Deiacco, Holmen & McKelvey, 2009; Deiacco, Hughes & McKelvey, 2012). The study illustrated that strategic actorhood of universities of applied sciences is not only responding to favourable conditions in the external environment but also active shaping of the environment through participating and influencing in different kinds of regional networks and policy drafting bodies. Thus, it can be argued that the capability to become a strategic actor is within the reach of Finnish higher education institutions, at least on the professionally-oriented side of the binary line. It is in the interest of these institutions to attract investments and start-up companies to the region that operate in the same field the institution has defined as its priority area. The better they are at building these kinds of regional clusters, the better employment prospects there are for their graduates. The aim of 'the Strategic Six' seems to be a strong strategic player at least on regional level and thus achieve a fit between the profile areas of the institution and the profiles of the region.

The strong alliance and partnership building activities of the UASs not only with local industries but also with Finnish and foreign educational institutions would also offer a chance to extend the research funding base. By partnering with universities and other research institutions who have a strong basic research background the UASs could find new opportunities to get joint project funding without the threat of losing their mission of applied research and regional impact.

Although providing plenty of examples of the strategic actions to change internal structures to align with the positioning strategy ie. tightening the couplings between the profiling strategy and the internal institutional structure (Pinheiro & Stensaker 2014a, 2014b), this study found out that the positioning strategies are planned to be executed mainly with the current staff although small-scale personnel restructuring and promotion activities are taking place (cf. Fumasoli, 2015; Mosey, Wright & Clarysse, 2012). This is not to say that the human resource function of UASs would not function well in general, but the important question is what happens to the personnel whose expertise falls outside of the strategic profile? Will they be dismissed (Whitley, 2008; 2012), perhaps re-trained and will the profiling decisions, ie. prioritising the expertise of some researchers affect the work motivation of others as Rhodes (2000) suggests? Vuori (2015b) has observed how the managerialistic ethos of UASs is paralleled with a strong focus on employee empowerment. The interplay of these two forces could be seen to soften the effect of overtly rational strategic human resource management such as replacing the old staff with new with better fit to the profile. As the examples of this study showed, this may result, at least in short term, in more employee-friendly solutions such as hiring part-time researchers or using more experienced researchers from international partner institutions as mentors.

As the investigation of short term results of the Strategic Six did not reveal in any pattern, further studies in a longer time range should be conducted on whether the implementation activities of universities of applied sciences actually lead to better performance. Moreover, as this study did not intend to compare strategic actorhood of UASs and research universities, comparative studies conducted on both sides of the binary line could provide additional insight into the effects of profiling and strategy implementation in higher education institutions.

## **References**

- Aarrevaara, T., Dobson, I. R. and Pekkola, E. (2011). Finland: CAPtivate academics—An examination of the binary divide. In W. Locke, W.K. Cummings and D. Fisher (eds.) *Changing Governance and Management in Higher Education: The Perspectives of the Academy*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 243–262.
- Beerens, M., Benneworth, P., de Boer, H., Cremonini, L., Jongbloed, B. and Vossensteyn, H. (2010) *Profiling and funding. An international comparative study*. Cheps University of Twente: Enchede. Available at [http://www.ihem.nl/themereports/profiling\\_and\\_funding\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ihem.nl/themereports/profiling_and_funding_2010.pdf) Accessed 20 September 2015.
- Bowen G. A. (2009) Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9 (2), pp. 27–40.
- Chandler, A. D. (1973) *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Coates, H., Edwards, D., Goedegebuure, L. C. J., Thakur, M., van der Brugge, E. and van Vught, F. A. (2013). *Profiling Diversity of Australian Universities*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- De Boer H., Enders J. and Leisyte L. (2007) On Striking the Right Notes. Shifts in Governance and the Organizational Transformation of Universities. *Public Administration*, 85 (1), pp. 27–46.
- Deiaco, E., Holmén, M. and McKelvey, M. (2009) What does it mean conceptually that universities compete? In M. McKelvey and M. Holmén (eds.), *Learning to Compete in European Universities: From Social Institutions to Knowledge Business*. Cheltenham: Edward Elger, pp. 300–328.
- Deiaco, E., Hughes, A. and McKelvey, M. (2012) Universities as strategic actors in the knowledge economy. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36 (3), pp. 525–541.
- Dodgson, M. and Staggs, J. (2012) Government policy, university strategy and the academic entrepreneur: The case of Queensland’s smart state institutes. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36 (3), 567–585.
- Fitzgerald, T. (2007) Documents and Documentary Analysis: Reading Between the Lines. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman and M. Morrison (eds.), *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management* 2nd ed. London: Sage, pp. 278–294.
- Fumasoli, T. (2015) Strategic management of academic human resources: A comparative analysis of flagship. In F. M. Ribeiro, Y. Politis and B. Culum (eds.), *New Voices in Higher Education Research and Scholarship*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global, pp. 18–37.
- Fumasoli, T. and Huisman, J. (2013) Strategic Agency and System Diversity: Conceptualizing Institutional Positioning in Higher Education. *Minerva*, 51 (2), pp. 155–169.

- Fumasoli, T. and Lepori, B. (2011) Patterns of Strategies in Swiss Higher Education Institutions. *Higher Education*, 61 (2), pp. 157–178.
- Howells, J., Ramlogan, R. and Cheng, S. (2012) Innovation and university collaboration: Paradox and complexity within the knowledge economy. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36 (3), 703–721.
- Hrebiniak, L. G. (2013) *Making Strategy Work: Leading Effective Execution and Change*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: FT Press.
- Jarillo, J. C. (1988) On Strategic Networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 9 (1), pp. 31–41.
- Jiang N. and Carpenter V. (2013) A Case Study of Issues of Strategy Implementation in Internationalization of Higher Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27 (1), pp. 4–18.
- Kaplan, R.S. and Norton, D.P. (1996) Using the Balanced Scorecard as a Strategic Management System, *Harvard Business Review*, 74 (1), pp. 75–85.
- Kettunen J. (2005) Implementation of Strategies in Continuing Education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19 (3), pp. 207–217.
- Klumpp, M., de Boer, H. and Vossensteyn, H. (2014) Comparing National Policies on Institutional Profiling in Germany and the Netherlands. *Comparative Education*, 50 (2), pp.156–176.
- Krücken, G. and Meier, F. (2006) Turning the University into an Organizational Actor. In G. S. Drori, J. W. Meyer and H. Hwang (eds.), *Globalization and Organization. World Society and Organizational Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 241–257.
- Laudel, G. and Weyer, E. (2014) Where Have all the Scientists Gone? Building Research Profiles at Dutch universities and its Consequences for Research. In R. Whitley and J. Gläser (eds.) *Organizational Transformation and Scientific Change: The Impact of Institutional Restructuring on Universities and Intellectual Innovation*. Bielefeld, UK: Emerald, pp. 111–140.
- Maassen, P., Kallioinen, O., Keränen, P., Penttinen, M., Spaapen, J., Widenhofer, R., Kajaste, M. and Mattila, J. (2012) *From the bottom up: Evaluation of RDI activities of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences*. Helsinki: Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.
- Meier, F. and Schimank, U. (2010) Mission now Possible. Profile Building and Leadership in German Universities. In R. Whitley, J. Gläser and L. Engwall (eds.), *Reconfiguring Knowledge Production: Changing Authority Relationships in the Sciences and their Consequences for Intellectual Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 211–236.
- Ministry of Education (2007) *Education and research 2007–2012*. Helsinki: Ministry of Education.

- Ministry of Education (2008) *Ammattikorkeakoulujen sopimusneuvotteluja koskevat ohjeet. [Instructions for target and performance agreement negotiations]*. Available at <http://www.minedu.fi> Accessed 2 August 2015.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) *Ammattikorkeakoulujen toimilupahakemukset – ohjekirje 5.7.2013 [Renewal of the operating licences of universities of applied sciences – letter of instruction 5 July 2013]*. Available at <http://www.minedu.fi> Accessed 10 October 2015.
- Ministry of Education and Culture (2015) *Ammattikorkeakoulujen toimilupien uudistaminen [Renewal of the operating licences of universities of applied sciences]*. Available at <http://www.minedu.fi> Accessed 2 August 2015.
- Mosey, S., Wright, M. and Clarysse, B. (2012) Transforming traditional university structures for the knowledge economy through multidisciplinary institutes. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36 (3), pp. 587–607.
- Musselin, C. (2006) Are Universities Specific Organisations? In C. Krücken, A. Kosmützky and M. Torca (eds.), *Towards a Multiversity? Universities between Global Trends and National Traditions*: Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, pp. 63–84.
- Noble, C. H. (1999) The Eclectic Roots of Strategy Implementation Research. *Journal of Business Research*, 45 (2), pp. 119–134.
- Okumus, F. (2001) Towards a Strategy Implementation Framework. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13 (7), pp.327–338.
- Paton, S., Chia, R. and Burt. G. (2014) Relevance or ‘Relevate’? How University Business Schools can Add Value through Reflexively Learning from Strategic Partnerships with Business. *Management Learning*, 45 (3), pp. 267–288.
- Philbin S. P. (2011) Design and Implementation of the Balanced Scorecard at a University Institute. *Measuring Business Excellence*, 15 (3), pp. 34–45.
- Pietilä, M. (2014) The Many Faces of Research Profiling: Academic Leaders’ Conceptions of Research Steering. *Higher Education*, 67 (3), pp. 303–316.
- Pinheiro, R., Benneworth, P. and Jones, G. A. (2015) Beyond the Obvious: Tensions and Volitions Surrounding. In L.M. Carmo Farinha., J. J. Ferreira, H.L Smith, H. L. and S. Bagchi-Sen (eds.), *Handbook of Research on Global Competitive Advantage through Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global, pp. 150–172.
- Pinheiro, R. and Stensaker, B. (2014a) Strategic Actor–hood and Internal transformation: The Rise of the Quadruple–helix University. In P. Zgaga, J. Branković, M. Klemenčić and P. Lažetić (eds.), *Global Challenges, Local Responses in Higher Education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 171–189.
- Pinheiro, R. and Stensaker, B. (2014b) Designing the Entrepreneurial University: The Interpretation of a Global Idea. *Public Organization Review*, 14 (4), 497–516.

- Rahimnia F., Castka P. and Sharp J. M. (2005) Towards Understanding the Impeders of Strategy Implementation in Higher Education (HE) A Case of HE Institutes in Iran. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 13 (2), pp. 132–147.
- Rahimnia F., Polychronakis Y. and Sharp J. M. (2009) A Conceptual Framework of Impeders to Strategy Implementation from an Exploratory Case Study in an Iranian University. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 2 (4), pp. 246–261.
- Ramirez, F. O. (2010) Accounting for Excellence: Transforming Universities into Organizational Actors. In V. D. Rust, L. Portnoi and S. S. Bagley (eds.), *Higher Education, Policy, and the Global Competition Phenomenon*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 43–58.
- Rhoades, G. (2000) Who’s Doing it Right? Strategic Activity in Public Research Universities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 24 (1), pp. 41–66.
- Sayed N. (2013) Ratify, Reject or Revise: Balanced Scorecard and Universities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 27 (3), pp. 203–220.
- Shah M. and Nair C. S. (2014) Turning the Ship Around: Rethinking Strategy Development and Implementation in Universities. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 22 (2), pp. 145–157.
- Silander, C. and Haake, U. (2016). Gold-diggers, supporters and inclusive profilers: Strategies for profiling research in Swedish higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, published online. DOI:10.1080/03075079.2015.1130031
- Stensaker, B., Frølich, N., Huisman, J., Waagene, E., Scordato, L. and Pimentel Bótas, P. (2014) Factors Affecting Strategic Change in Higher Education. *Journal of Strategy and Management* 7 (2), pp. 193–207.
- Thompson, A.A. and Strickland, A. J. (1995) *Strategic Management. Concepts and Cases*. 8th ed. Chicago: Irwin.
- Toma J. D. (2012) Institutional Strategy: Positioning for Prestige. In M. N. Bastedo (ed.), *The Organization of Higher Education. Managing Colleges for a New Era*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 118–159.
- U-map. (2015) Available at <http://www.u-portal.org/u-map/> Accessed 20 September 2015.
- Van Vught, F. and Huisman, J. (2013) Institutional Profiles: Some Strategic Tools. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, 1 (1), pp. 21–36.
- Vipunen (2016) Online Statistics Database of Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish Board of Education. <http://www.vipunen.fi>. Last accessed 3 June 2016.
- Vuori, J. (2015a) Institutional positioning in Finnish higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 21 (4), pp. 316–324.

- Vuori, J. (2015b) Enacting the common script: Management ideas at Finnish universities of applied sciences. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 43 (4), pp. 646–660.
- Waterman, R. H., Peters, T. J. and Phillips, J. R. (1980) Structure is not Organization. *Business Horizons*, 23 (3), pp.14–26.
- Whitley, R. (2008) Universities as Strategic Actors: Limitations and Variations. In L. Engwall, and D. Weaire (eds.) *The University in the Market*. London: Portland Press, pp. 23–37.
- Whitley, R. (2012) Transforming Universities: National Conditions of their Varied Organisational Actorhood. *Minerva*, 50 (4), pp. 493–510.
- Whitley R. and Gläser, J. (2014) The Impact of Institutional Reforms on the Nature of Universities as Organisations. In R. Whitley and J. Gläser (eds.) *Organizational Transformation and Scientific Change: The Impact of Institutional Restructuring on Universities and Intellectual Innovation*. Bielefeld: Emerald, pp. 19–49.

Appendix 1.

The sample of the Strategic Six

	<b>UAS1</b>	<b>UAS2</b>	<b>UAS3</b>	<b>UAS4</b>	<b>UAS5</b>	<b>UAS6</b>
<b>students</b>	5.844	4.437	4.335	7.660	3.088	5.034
<b>staff</b>	476	343	268	591	211	322
<b>external research funding (million €)</b>	8.1	6.2	3.7	5.5	1.2	3.6
<b>pages in the document</b>	32	18	48	33	45	27
<b>educational fields</b>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Natural resources and the environment</p> <p>Natural sciences</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Natural resources and the environment</p> <p>Natural sciences</p> <p>Tourism, catering and domestic services</p> <p>Humanities and education</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Natural resources and the environment</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Natural resources and the environment</p> <p>Natural sciences</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Tourism catering and domestic services</p>	<p>Culture</p> <p>Social sciences, business and administration</p> <p>Technology, communication and transport</p> <p>Social services, health and sport</p> <p>Tourism catering and domestic services</p> <p>Natural sciences</p>
<b>Profile</b>	<p>Expertise on arctic conditions</p>	<p>Lifelong learning</p> <p>Research and development</p> <p>Digital information management</p>	<p>International affairs &amp; Russia competence development together with higher education institutions and businesses</p>	<p>technological competence and entrepreneurship</p> <p>sustainable technology</p> <p>digital services</p> <p>ubiquitous virtual teaching</p> <p>strong adult educator</p> <p>international research</p>	<p>International institution with expertise on Russia</p>	<p>Environment &amp; energy efficiency</p> <p>Integrative pedagogics</p> <p>Student entrepreneurship</p>

				supporting the world of work		
<b>Priority areas</b>	<p>Arctic co-operation and cross-border expertise</p> <p>Smart use of natural resources</p> <p>Managing distances</p> <p>Safety &amp; security knowledge</p>	<p>Sustainable well-being</p> <p>Digital archieving &amp; services</p> <p>Materials technology &amp; environment safety</p>	<p>Environment-friendly energy production &amp; utilisation</p> <p>Competitive logistics &amp; sea transport and their safety</p> <p>Well-being and business services</p>	<p>vocational teacher education</p> <p>natural resources education</p> <p>the development of vocational top competence</p> <p>the digitalisation of everyday services and industry</p> <p>sustainable bio energy</p> <p>sheet metal competence and steel construction</p>	<p>Service business development</p> <p>Business from technology innovation</p> <p>Customer-centricity and efficiency in health services</p>	<p>Design</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Development of well-being services</p>