

Current Status and Issues Concerning the Formulation and Operation of Mid-Term Plans for Japanese National Universities - Based on the Results of a Questionnaire Survey

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Abstract

Today, many universities are faced with diverse and rapid changes in the business environment and need to improve their management. Since the formulation and implementation of management plans is effective as a method of management improvement, all Japanese universities are required to formulate mid-term plans. However, the formulation and operation of university management plans has not been established, and it is assumed that mid-term plans are not sufficiently conducive to improving management planning. In light of this situation, we conducted a survey of all universities in Japan to understand the current status of and issues related to mid-term planning. Based on the survey results, the presentation will report on the current roles and issues of mid-term plans of national universities, the focus and issues of the formulation process, and the current status and issues related to their operation after formulation.

Keywords: Mid-term plans, Institutional research, Japanese national universities, Questionnaires surveys

1 Introduction

Today, many universities are faced with diverse and rapid changes in the business environment and need to improve their management. Since the formulation and implementation of management plans is effective as a method of management improvement, not only national and public universities but also private universities are required to formulate mid-term plans. In particular, national universities have been required to establish mid-term objectives and mid-term plans every six years since 2004, and are currently implementing their

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fourth mid-term plans.

However, the formulation and operation of university management plans has not been established, and it is assumed that mid-term plans are not sufficiently conducive to improving management planning. In fact, the authors, as practitioners in charge of evaluation and Institutional Research (IR), have experienced doubts about the appropriateness and effectiveness of mid-term plans. For example, the initiatives and outcomes envisaged in the mid-term plans may be unclear, and little attention is paid to progress management and evaluation in the formulation of mid-term plans, with the result that those in charge of implementing and evaluating mid-term plans face difficulties in the implementation and evaluation phases [1][2].

In light of this situation, we conducted a survey of all national, public, and private universities in Japan to understand the current status of and issues related to mid-term planning. The characteristics of mid-term plans differs depending on the type of university establishment. Japanese national universities are required to prepare a mid-term plan and to evaluate the achievement of the mid-term plan. The results of this evaluation are reflected in the budget. Therefore, the mid-term plans of national universities include aspects of university management plans and aspects subject to national university corporation evaluation. This paper describes some of the results of the questionnaire survey on national universities.

2 Related Studies

Previous studies on university mid-term plans include Oishi et al [3][4], who analyzed the status and issues in the third mid-term plans on globalization; Takata [2], who analyzed the contents of national universities' third-term plans in the field of education; and Ogashiwa [5], who clarified the characteristic sentences and related data in the mid-term plans of private universities deemed exemplary on the basis of financial and other factors. With regard to the management plans of national universities, Takata and Mori [6], a case study on the challenges of managing the progress of mid-term plans, and Fujii [7], who analyzed the indicators of the third mid-term plans. Furthermore, with regard to planning methods, Morozumi [8] on how management plans should be developed for private universities; Morozumi [9], who pointed out the importance of explaining mid-term plans to teaching staff in order to develop mid-term plans that produce results based on a survey of private university presidents; and Takata [1] on how mid-term plans should be developed in national universities from the perspective of national university corporation evaluation. While these previous studies provide valuable insights into university management planning, we could not find any empirical studies on the current awareness of and challenges to mid-term planning, particularly the fourth mid-term plans, in national universities.

3 Method

In this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted among those in charge of formulating mid-term plans for all universities in Japan. Requests for cooperation in the survey were made in writing to 816 Japanese universities, and responses were made via a web-based system. The survey was conducted over a two-month period from December 2023 to January 2024. The number of response and response rate were as shown in Table 1. The survey content included awareness of the importance and issues related to the role, process

Table 1: The number of response and response rate

Type of university	Number of response	Total number	Response rate
National universities	45	86	52.3%
Public universities	43	102	42.2%
Private universities	99	628	15.7%

Table 2: Role of the mid-term plan

Rank	Options	Number	Percentage
1	Formation of common goals of the campus constituents	42	93.3%
2	Guiding principles for the activities of the members of the university	40	88.9%
3	Medium-term management guidelines	38	84.4%
4	Criteria for evaluation of business performance by the national and local governments	36	80.0%
5	Commitment to business plans with national and local governments	30	66.7%
6	Tools for communication with external stakeholders	29	64.4%
7	Guidelines for allocating management resources for effective use	25	55.6%

of formulation, content and wording, and usage of IR of the mid-term plan currently being implemented. The format was multiple-choice.

4 Results

This section presents the results of the survey of 45 national universities which had completed to answer the questionnaire survey.

4.1 The role of the mid-term plan

The responses in descending order for the question “What role does your institution’s mid-term plan actually play?” are shown in Table 2.

4.2 Points and issues to focus on in the mid-term planning process

On the question “What do you consider to be particularly important in the process of developing a mid-term plan?” and other question “Are there any issues regarding the current process of developing a mid-term plan?”, the responses to the same options in order of the number of responses to the former question are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Mid-term planning process

Options	Importance	Issue
Leadership of the Rector	1 / 43 / 95.6%	10 / 4 / 8.9%
Utilization of various data on the current situation	2 / 31 / 68.9%	3 / 16 / 35.6%
Hearing from the Executive Board	3 / 29 / 64.4%	13 / 1 / 2.2%
Forecasting future situations	4 / 23 / 51.1%	2 / 18 / 40.0%
Information sharing with internal stakeholders	4 / 23 / 51.1%	8 / 7 / 15.6%
Involvement of internal stakeholders in the development process	6 / 22 / 48.9%	8 / 7 / 15.6%
Hearing from frontline personnel	7 / 21 / 46.7%	7 / 8 / 17.8%
Hearing from external stakeholders	8 / 15 / 33.3%	1 / 18 / 40.0%
Discussion at meetings (board of directors, executive board, management council, etc.)	9 / 14 / 31.1%	15 / 0 / 0.0%
Dissemination of the plan within the university after its formulation	10 / 11 / 24.4%	6 / 9 / 20.0%
Clarification of who is in charge of the mid-term plan	11 / 10 / 22.2%	10 / 4 / 8.9%
Hearing from students	12 / 3 / 6.7%	4 / 12 / 26.7%
Dissemination of the plan to the outside world after it has been formulated	13 / 2 / 4.4%	13 / 1 / 2.2%
Alignment of internal stakeholders' interests	14 / 0 / 0.0%	12 / 3 / 6.7%
None in particular	15 / 0 / 0.0%	5 / 11 / 24.4%

For example, "1 / 43 / 95.6%" means that this option's rank is 1 and has 43 responses which is equivalent to 95.6% of 45 responses.

Table 4: Contents and wording of the mid-term plan

Options	Importance	Issue
Following the University's vision and long-range plan	1 / 45 / 100.0%	10 / 4 / 8.9%
Ensuring achievability in the evaluation	2 / 34 / 75.6%	1 / 17 / 37.8%
Taking into account the needs of the stakeholders	3 / 28 / 62.2%	7 / 8 / 17.8%
Ensure evaluability during the evaluation	4 / 26 / 57.8%	2 / 16 / 35.6%
Based on the logic model	5 / 21 / 46.7%	4 / 11 / 24.4%
Specify evaluation indicators (target values)	6 / 20 / 44.4%	8 / 7 / 15.6%
Taking into account the policy requirements of the national and local governments	7 / 19 / 42.2%	12 / 2 / 4.4%
Concreteness of content	8 / 11 / 24.4%	4 / 11 / 24.4%
Clarity of wording	9 / 6 / 13.3%	6 / 9 / 20.0%
Taking into account the results of the accreditation	10 / 4 / 8.9%	14 / 0 / 0.0%
Balancing the areas of the mid-term plan	11 / 3 / 6.7%	12 / 2 / 4.4%
Balance of responsibilities of each organization in the mid-term plan	12 / 1 / 2.2%	12 / 2 / 4.4%
The specification of keywords for each plan	12 / 1 / 2.2%	14 / 0 / 0.0%
Number of items	14 / 0 / 0.0%	9 / 6 / 13.3%
Number of characters	14 / 0 / 0.0%	14 / 0 / 0.0%

For example, "1 / 45 / 100.0%" means that this option's rank is 1 and has 45 responses which is equivalent to 100.0% of 45 responses.

4.3 Points and issues to be emphasized in formulating the contents and wording of the mid-term plan

On the question "What do you consider to be particularly important in terms of developing the specific content and wording of the mid-term plan?" and "Are there any issues regarding the wording of the current mid-term plan?", the responses to the same options in order of the number of responses to the former question are shown in Table 4.

4.4 IR in the development of mid-term plans

When asked the question, "Do you think data should be used in the development of mid-term plans?", 100.0% of respondents answered "Yes." In response to the question, "Does your institution have a person or department in charge of IR?", 97.8% of the respondents answered "Yes." In response to the question, "Do you consider the role of IR to be important with regard to the use of data in the formulation of mid-term plans?", the top two responses combined for a total of 93.4%, with the majority of responses indicating that the role of IR is important. On the other hand, when asked, "Are there any challenges regarding IR at your institution?", the options in descending order of the number of responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: IR Issues

Rank	Options	Number	Percentage
1	Insufficient IR personnel	39	86.7%
2	Insufficient analytical capability of IR	21	46.7%
3	Insufficient IR data	11	24.4%
4	Inadequacy of information system to handle IR data	10	22.2%
5	Attitude of the executive board regarding the use of IR data	9	20.0%
6	Inadequate method of providing IR data	3	6.7%

Table 6: Points to note from each aspect

Aspect	Purpose	University Notes
Management plan	Initiatives and improvements	Sharing awareness, finding areas for improvement are important (clarity, concreteness, sharing, etc.)
Corporate evaluation	Performance evaluation	Achievement are important (achievability, devising wording according to evaluation methods and criteria, etc.)

5 Consideration

5.1 The actual role of the mid-term plan

The mid-term plan of a national university has two aspects: one is the aspect of the university's management plan and the other is the aspect subject to corporate evaluation, and depending on the different objectives of each aspect, there are common points and differences that the university should pay attention to, as shown in Table 6. If the mid-term plan does not take these points into consideration, the work of those in charge of implementing and evaluating the mid-term plan will become more difficult and burdensome.

The survey results show that all options are above 50%, indicating a situation in which mid-term planning plays a multifaceted role. However, the top three choices were all related to aspects of management planning. Furthermore, with the exception of one university, all universities answered at least one of these three choices. On the other hand, the choices related to aspects of the subject of corporate evaluation were relatively low. It is assumed that this is due to the fact that national universities are also becoming more aware of the management of their universities and the relative decline in the status of corporate evaluation.

5.2 The process of formulating the mid-term plan

In terms of importance, the roles of the President and the Executive Board were most frequently mentioned. The number of "information sharing to internal stakeholders" affecting the effectiveness of the mid-term plan [1] was rather small, which is somewhat out of line

with the large number of “formation of common goals for internal constituents” and “guiding activities of internal constituents” in the roles of the mid-term plan in section 5.1.

On the other hand, in terms of challenges, many of the issues were related to data as the basis for mid-term plans. The existence of issues such as increased awareness of the use of data and the lack of IR personnel, as well as the importance of forecasting in uncertain times, are presumed to be factors. In addition, listening to the opinions of stakeholders including students was also pointed out as an issue. On the other hand, few respondents pointed out issues related to the roles of the mid-term plan described in section 5.1, “formation of common goals for members of the university” and “guidelines for activities of members of the university,” but there are some discrepancies with the authors’ experience, and further confirmation is considered necessary.

5.3 Formulation of the contents and wording of the mid-term plan

In terms of both importance and issues to be addressed, many issues related to the aspects subject to corporate evaluation were indicated in addition to the aspects of the management plan. In the role of the mid-term plan described in section 5.1, the aspects subject to corporate evaluation were relatively low, but it can be inferred that the issues related to the content and wording are due to the fact that they become apparent during the evaluation process. However, the appearance of more options that were answered by more universities in terms of both importance and issues, such as ensuring achievability and ensuring evaluability, indicates a situation where there are issues while placing importance. It can be inferred that the existence of issues related to IR and the lack of skills in the formulation of mid-term plans and in evaluation are factors.

5.4 IR in the formulation of mid-term plans

With regard to the formulation of the mid-term plan, data is important and IR is highly expected, but it appears that there are many issues that need to be addressed. This point is consistent with the fact that many of the issues regarding the process of formulating mid-term plans were related to the data that form the basis of the mid-term plans. Among the issues, the shortage of IR personnel was particularly common. Although most of the national universities have a person or department in charge of IR, the shortage of IR personnel seems to be hindering the analysis. The shortage of IR personnel is an issue that has been pointed out ever since IR was introduced to Japan, and has yet to be resolved. From the viewpoint of appropriate mid-term planning, the enhancement of IR human resource development is an urgent issue.

6 Future Works

This paper presents some of the survey results related to mid-term plans of national universities. As mentioned above, there are two aspects to the mid-term planning of national universities, but a bias toward either of the points to be noted from each aspect will impede the work involved. We plan to discuss how the two should be balanced from the viewpoint of those in charge of evaluation and IR practices.

In addition, an overall comparative review of the survey results will be conducted in the future, taking into account the differences in character between the mid-term plans of public and private universities.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 21K02659.

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