



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MODERN EDUCATION
(IJMOE)

www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe



FROM STRATEGY TO LEARNING: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nazreen Sahol Hamid^{1*}, Mohd Fairuz Adnan², Halil Paino³, Farid Wajdi Mohamad Isa⁴

¹ Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

 nazreensahol@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3289-7242>

² Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

 fairuzadnan@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8386-5891>

³ Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

 halil@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6026-6607>

⁴ Wood Mackenzie, 26th Floor, Menara Maxis, Kuala Lumpur City Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

 faredisa@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2425-2419>

*Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 07.08.2026

Revised date: 25.08.2026

Accepted date: 08.09.2026

Published date: 22.09.2026

To cite this document:

Hamid, N. S., Adnan, M. F., Paino, H., & Isa, F. W. M. (2026). From Strategy To Learning: Strategic Planning For Continuous Improvement In Higher Education. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 8(31), 1115-1133.

Abstract:

Higher education widely uses strategic planning to align performance expectations, resources, and institutional goals. However, the existence of a strategic plan, performance indicators, and monitoring systems does not automatically generate continuous improvement. This conceptual paper argues that improvement occurs when implementation evidence, stakeholder feedback, and risk information are interpreted and translated into corrective action, organisational learning and subsequent planning decisions. The paper integrates the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle with the Approach-Deployment-Learning-Integration (ADLI) dimensions to propose a seven-stage Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework. PDCA provides the cyclical logic through which improvement progresses from planning to implementation, review and action, while ADLI provides a complementary lens for assessing the extent to which the underlying processes are systematic, consistently deployed, learning-oriented and institutionally integrated. The stages comprise strategic alignment, action planning, strategic deployment, evidence generation, reflective review, adaptive action, and institutional integration. A practice-based institutional illustration from the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA, is used to show how the framework may operate through strategic action plans, distributed project ownership, digital

monitoring systems, periodic governance reviews, stakeholder feedback, and documented corrective actions. It also focuses on three strategic projects relating to alumni and industry linkages, social responsibility and knowledge transfer, and entrepreneurship development. The paper concludes that strategic planning becomes a learning system only when evidence is connected to review, action, and institutionalisation. The proposed framework contributes by clarifying the complementary roles of PDCA and ADLI and offers faculty leaders, quality units, and strategic planning coordinators a structured approach for moving beyond activity reporting toward sustained organisational learning.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.831064

Keyword:

ADLI; Continuous Improvement; Higher Education; Organisational Learning; PDCA; Strategic Planning



© The authors (2026). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact ijmoe@gaexcellence.com.

Introduction

Higher education institutions are expected to respond to accountability requirements, technological change, and resource constraints while meeting the expectations of students, government, employers, professional bodies and communities. Strategic planning provides a way to translate broad institutional goals into priorities for faculties and academic units, including teaching, staff development, research and external engagement (Bryson, 2018; Dooris et al., 2004). However, having a strategic plan does not ensure that those priorities will influence day-to-day decisions. Responsibilities may remain unclear, monitoring may be fragmented, and reporting may become a compliance exercise rather than a basis for improvement. Mintzberg (1994) cautioned against overly formal planning systems that restrict strategic thinking, while Kaplan and Norton (2008) emphasised the importance of connecting strategy with operations and performance review. George et al. (2019) similarly found that the benefits of formal planning depend on the quality of its design and implementation. The concern of this paper starts after the implementation. Indicators, dashboards and review meetings do not improve performance by themselves. Their value depends on the evidence being discussed, interpreted, and used to change what the faculty does next. Strategic planning then becomes part of continuous improvement when monitoring leads to review and review leads to a subsequent action.

Performance evidence alone is seldom sufficient in higher education. Project completion, student participation, research outputs, and stakeholder satisfaction provide useful signals, but what they mean depends on context and quality of implementation. Fu and Sung (2026), for example, show that standard quality indicators may overlook process evidence that is important in community-engaged programmes. Quantitative monitoring therefore needs to be considered together with qualitative feedback and reflective review.

For strategic planning to support continuous improvement, the evidence generated during implementation must therefore inform review, action, and subsequent planning decisions. The literature offers useful but separate perspectives on this process. Strategic planning studies have largely examined formulation, implementation and performance effects (George et al., 2019; Wolf & Floyd, 2017). PDCA explains how improvement proceeds through a recurring cycle of planning, implementation, review and action (Moen & Norman, 2010), while ADLI focuses on whether organisational processes are systematic, consistently deployed, learning-oriented and integrated (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2023). What is less clear is how these perspectives can be linked at the faculty level so that monitoring evidence, stakeholder feedback, and risk information lead to adaptive action, which is then carried forward into subsequent planning cycles. This paper addresses that gap by combining the cyclical logic of PDCA with the maturity and integration perspective of ADLI in a seven-stage Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework.

This paper therefore aims to conceptualise strategic planning as a continuous improvement system in higher education. It addresses three questions: (1) how strategic planning can operate as a continuous improvement process; (2) how monitoring, stakeholder feedback and risk review contribute to organisational learning and adaptive action; and (3) how PDCA and ADLI can be combined in a faculty-level framework for sustained improvement. The Faculty of Accountancy at Universiti Teknologi MARA is used as a practice-based institutional illustration. This is a conceptual paper rather than an empirical case study. The institutional material is used to show how the proposed relationships may operate in practice and is not intended to validate the framework empirically or establish causal relationships.

Literature Review

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Strategic planning is a way for an organization to decide where it is heading, what issues the organisation needs to focus on and how resources and responsibilities should be distributed. Bryson (2018) describes it as a disciplined decision process, while Dooris et al. (2004) demonstrate that in higher education its value depends on how planning is translated into institutional practice. Trainer (2004) likewise argues that planning tools are useful when they support analysis, coordination and learning rather than becoming stand-alone administrative exercises. This is particularly relevant in universities because authority and expertise are distributed across faculties, departments and professional groups. A faculty must respond to university priorities while also dealing with disciplinary requirements, accreditation, labour-market expectations, and external stakeholders. Strategic planning at faculty level therefore involves both alignment with institutional direction and coordination among the units and groups responsible for implementation.

Evidence on strategic planning is generally positive but also shows important limitations. George et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between strategic planning and organisational performance, whereas Wolf and Floyd (2017) emphasise the routines and practices through which strategy is actually enacted. Mintzberg (1994) adds an important caution: formal planning can become restrictive when following the plan becomes more important than learning from implementation. This distinction is central to the present paper because the concern is not only whether a plan exists, but whether experience from implementation changes later decisions. Adnan et al. (2025) previously showed how strategic action plans, monitoring,

risk management and stakeholder engagement supported strategy execution in UiTM's Faculty of Accountancy. The present paper extends that work by examining how such evidence can become organisational learning and institutional integration.

Continuous Improvement and the PDCA Cycle

Continuous improvement is the use of evidence repeatedly to assess processes, identify weaknesses, introduce changes and determine if these changes improve performance. It differs from a one-off corrective action because evaluation, learning and adaptation become recurring components of the management process. Deming's (1986) quality philosophy emphasised management responsibility, systems thinking and the disciplined use of evidence to improve processes over time. From this perspective, improvement is not complete when a problem is resolved. What is learned from the intervention should inform subsequent decisions and future planning.

The PDCA cycle provides a structured representation of this process. In the Plan stage, an organisation identifies the issue to be addressed, defines objectives, establishes measures and determines how the activity will be implemented. The Do stage puts the planned approach into practice with assigned responsibilities and generates evidence about implementation. The Check stage compares this evidence with the intended objectives but should go beyond identifying whether a target was achieved. It also requires consideration of why the results occurred, what was learned during implementation, how stakeholders experienced the activity and whether the original assumptions remain appropriate. The Act stage uses this learning to determine what should be standardised, modified, or discontinued. Successful changes may be retained, while ineffective approaches may be revised before the next cycle begins. Act therefore leads back to Plan rather than representing the end of the process. Moen and Norman (2010) explain that PDCA developed from the scientific method and is closely associated with the Plan-Do-Study-Act approach.

The cyclical logic is particularly relevant in higher education. A programme may be delivered on time and achieve its stated activity target but still require review of its relevance, inclusiveness, stakeholder experience, or longer-term impact. For this reason, the value of PDCA lies not only in completing each of the four stages, but also in maintaining the connections between them. Planning should identify the evidence needed for later assessment, implementation should generate that evidence, review should interpret both performance and its causes, and action should translate the learning into changes in processes, responsibilities, resources, or measures. Those changes should then influence the next planning cycle. When these connections are weak, PDCA may become a reporting routine rather than a genuine process of continuous improvement.

Organisational Learning and Evidence Use

Organisational learning provides a theoretical explanation for how evidence becomes institutional change. Argyris and Schon (1997) distinguish between single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning occurs when an organisation corrects a deviation while retaining its underlying goals, assumptions, and decision rules. Double-loop learning occurs when the organisation questions the assumptions or governing processes that produced the problem. Both forms of learning are valuable, but they have different implications for strategic improvement. In the context of faculties, initiating additional promotional activities to increase

participation may represent single-loop learning because the existing programme and target remain unchanged. Revising the definition of participation, changing the programme's governance, or redesigning the way stakeholders are selected, represents double-loop learning. The latter requires deeper reflection because it moves beyond correcting performance to reconsidering the system through which performance is produced.

Crossan et al. (1999) explain that organisational learning is a multilevel process involving intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalisation. Their framework is relevant because learning requires insights to be discussed, shared and coordinated before they can be embedded in routines, systems, and structures. Learning does not automatically move from individuals to organisations. Faculty members may identify valuable lessons during post-mortems, but those lessons remain local unless they are incorporated into procedures, future action plans, reporting systems, or resource decisions. Use of evidence is therefore both technical and social. Digital dashboards and performance systems improve visibility, but they do not interpret data. Interpretation takes place through meetings, discussions, stakeholder feedback, and professional judgement. Burke et al. (2026) illustrate how institutional data, system analytics, and stakeholder feedback can be combined to assess the embedding of a digital learning ecosystem. Their study demonstrates that effective institutional evaluation relies on multiple forms of evidence and sustained engagement rather than one performance measure.

Organisational learning also requires psychological and governance conditions that support honest review. Project leaders must be able to report difficulties without treating every shortfall as failure. Leaders must distinguish between accountability and blame while ensuring that review will result in decisions toward improvements. This is important because if evidence is collected only for reporting requirements, employees may focus only on report completion rather than using the information to identify weaknesses. A learning organisation should treat credible evidence of problems as an input to improvement.

For conceptual clarity, this paper distinguishes continuous improvement, organisational learning, and institutionalisation as related but distinct concepts. Continuous improvement refers to the recurring process through which evidence is used to evaluate and modify organisational practices. Organisational learning refers to the interpretation, sharing, and use of evidence to change organisational understanding and action. Institutionalisation occurs when those learned changes are embedded into formal routines, roles, systems, and subsequent planning. Continuous improvement is therefore the overarching process; organisational learning is the mechanism through which evidence acquires organisational meaning, and institutionalisation is the process through which that learning becomes embedded and sustained. Within the proposed framework, institutional integration represents the stage through which institutionalisation occurs.

ADLI as a Process Maturity and Integration Lens

ADLI is used within the Baldrige performance excellence model to evaluate the effectiveness of organisational processes. The dimensions are Approach, Deployment, Learning and Integration. Approach concerns the design, appropriateness and systematic nature of a process, Deployment considers the extent to which the approach is applied consistently across relevant units and stakeholders. Learning examines how approaches are evaluated, refined and shared, including whether new knowledge contributes to innovation. According to the Baldrige

Performance Excellence model, integration considers whether approaches are aligned with current and future organisational needs and whether processes operate coherently in support of institution-wide goals.

In this paper, ADLI is used to complement PDCA because it questions dimensions that are not explicitly assessed within the basic improvement cycle, particularly the consistency of deployment, organisational learning and institutional integration. A faculty may undertake a PDCA cycle for a particular programme, but the approach may remain confined to one project or unit. Deployment examines whether the approach is applied consistently, Learning considers whether the institution evaluates and refines it and Integration examines whether the improved approach is aligned with the broader priorities and embedded within the organisational systems.

The distinction is particularly important in higher education where initiatives may initially operate as isolated projects or depend substantially on individual champions. Positive local outcomes do not necessarily indicate that the underlying process has become an institutional capability. From an ADLI perspective, stronger integration becomes evident when successful practices are supported by governance structures, resources, information systems, defined responsibilities and future planning. Raiden et al. (2025) illustrate how the integration of ethics, responsibility and sustainability within a management curriculum involves a systematic and joined-up approach, stakeholder negotiation, iterative reflection and gradual institutional ownership.

Integrating PDCA and ADLI

PDCA and ADLI address related but distinct aspects of organisational improvement. PDCA describes the recurring sequence through which a process is planned, implemented, evaluated and improved. ADLI assesses the systematic nature, reach, learning and institutional alignment of that process. For the purposes of this paper, PDCA is treated primarily as an improvement cycle while ADLI is used as a developmental and integrative assessment lens. In this paper, Strategic Alignment and Action Planning are associated mainly with Plan and Approach. Strategic Deployment is associated with 'Do' and Deployment. Evidence Generation and Reflective Review are linked with Check and Learning, while Adaptive Action reflects Act and Learning. Institutional Integration extends the analysis by considering whether successful learning has been incorporated into subsequent plans, routines, responsibilities and information systems.

The framework does not treat PDCA and ADLI as equivalent and interchangeable models. PDCA describes how improvement advances through a recurring sequence of planning, implementation, review and action. Whereas ADLI measures the maturity, consistency and institutional embedding of that process. Their integration provides a temporal improvement, a logical and an organizational maturity perspective.

Table 1: Proposed Conceptual Alignment of PDCA, ADLI and the Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework

PDCA	ADLI	Proposed Framework Stage
Plan	Approach	Strategic Alignment and Action Planning
Do	Deployment	Strategic Deployment
Check	Learning	Evidence Generation and Reflective Review
Act	Learning	Adaptive Action
Next planning cycle	Integration	Institutional Integration and Revised Strategic Alignment

Source: Authors' conceptualisation based on Moen and Norman (2010) and the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (2023).

This alignment is proposed by the authors for the purpose of the present concept and does not represent an official or exact equivalence between PDCA and ADLI.

The combined perspective addresses two potential weaknesses. Firstly, it prevents continuous improvement from being reduced to repeated activity without organisational maturation. Secondly, it prevents performance excellence from being treated as a static assessment of process maturity without a visible improvement cycle. The integrated framework developed in this paper uses PDCA to explain the movement of improvements and ADLI to examine its depth, consistency, learning, and institutionalisation. The proposed framework's contribution is not simply to place PDCA and ADLI side by side but to assign distinct and complementary analytical functions to the two models within a faculty-level learning architecture. PDCA describes an iterative process of improvement over time, while ADLI assesses the systematic, consistently deployed, learning-oriented, and institutionally embedded nature of the underlying processes. The seven-stage framework further disaggregates evidence generation, reflective review, adaptive action, and institutional integration, making explicit the mechanism through which performance information may move from project-level monitoring to organisational learning and sustained institutional capability.

Conceptual Approach

The paper adopts a practice-based conceptual approach synthesizing literature to develop the proposed framework, with institutional evidence employed illustratively rather than empirically validating the framework. It synthesises literature on strategic planning, continuous improvement, organisational learning, PDCA, ADLI and higher education quality to develop an integrated framework. The literature was selected purposefully for its relevance to the conceptual problem. The paper does not claim to provide a systematic or exhaustive review of every publication on strategic planning or quality management.

The proposed framework is illustrated using institutional documents from the Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. The principal source is the faculty's 2025 Anugerah Kualiti Nasib Canselor (AKNC) report. This source documented the strategic planning and implementation practices relating to alumni, community engagement, and

volunteerism (Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA [FPN], 2025). Supporting documents include the Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) for specific projects implemented by the faculty such as Dynamic Linkages, Impactful USR/KTP and FACTrepreneurial, together with the faculty's performance indicator achievement record for the year 2024. (FPN, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d).

The three projects were selected as institutional illustrations because they represent the project streams documented in the faculty's strategic action plans while covering distinct strategic domains, stakeholder groups, and delivery mechanisms. Dynamic Linkages represents alumni and industry engagement. Impactful USR/KTP represents community engagement and knowledge transfer. While FACTrepreneurial represents entrepreneurship development. This variation allows the proposed framework to be illustrated across different forms of faculty activity while retaining a common strategic planning and monitoring structure.

The institutional evidence was organised according to the proposed stages: strategic alignment, action planning, strategic deployment, evidence generation, reflective review, adaptive action, and institutional integration. Strategic planning practice, reporting mechanisms, risk issues, corrective responses, and their integration into subsequent systems were collected and analysed. Reported project performance and institutional outcomes are used descriptively to illustrate the monitoring process and progression. These are not treated as evidence that the framework caused the outcomes.

The approach is appropriate for this concept paper because the institutional material provides a practical context through which abstract relationships can be examined. Furthermore, the distinction between conceptual development and empirical validation is maintained. The framework remains a proposition for future testing across faculties and institutions. No reviews, surveys, or personal data were collected for this paper.

Institutional Illustration: Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement at Faculty of Accountancy, UiTM

Strategic Alignment and Action Planning

FPN developed its 2024 faculty strategic plan around the theme of a 'Globally Respected Faculty' and aligned it with the UiTM Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and broader national educational priorities (FPN, 2025). The planning process used the ADLI principles and translated broad aspirations into faculty-level strategic action plans. Within the alumni, community, and volunteerism focus areas, three main projects were established, which are Dynamic Linkages, Impactful USR/KTP and FACTrepreneurial. Dynamic Linkages focused on strengthening alumni and industry relationships through initiatives such as formal collaborations, career engagement, and Alumni Ambassadors. Whereas Impactful USR/KTP project addressed university social responsibility, service-learning, community engagement and knowledge transfer. FACTrepreneurial focused on entrepreneurship development, financial capability, digital entrepreneurship and related student activities. Although the projects had different beneficiaries and delivery mechanisms, they were connected to common faculty priorities, performance indicators and quality objectives.

The action-planning stage converted strategic direction into named projects, activity schedules, project ownership, indicators and resource requirements. This step is important because broad goals such as stronger engagement or community impact cannot be managed until they are expressed in operational terms. The SAP documents recorded planned activities, milestones, evidence, and progress status, allowing project teams to observe whether implementation was progressing as planned (FPN, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d). Planning also involved identifying relevant stakeholders such as alumni, industry partners, students, lecturers, administrative staff, communities, and external agencies. They were not treated merely as recipients of completed programmes, instead they formed part of the delivery network. This is consistent with service-learning research showing that programme relevance and sustainability depend on community needs, effective management, committed relationships and adequate support (Mohd Naufal et al., 2024). Accordingly, stakeholder identification was particularly important as part of strategic design, rather than a later communication exercise.

The planning evidence reflects the Approach dimension of ADLI and the Plan stage of PDCA. However, the value of the approach depended on whether it was deployed consistently. A plan with clearly stated activities could still fail if project ownership, communication or monitoring were weak. The next stage therefore concerned how the faculty distributed responsibility and coordinated implementation.

Strategic Deployment and Ownership

Deployment occurred throughout formal governance structures and operational units. Project directors and managers were assigned, while ICAN, MASMED, lecturers, students, alumni and external partners contributed to implementation. The use of project ownership made responsibility visible and reduced the likelihood that the strategic plan would remain solely with the strategic planning coordinator. Implementation included activities under the three project streams rather than one standard delivery model. Dynamic Linkages relied on alumni and industry participation. Impactful USR/KTP programmes involved community programmes, domestic and international SULAM, volunteerism and knowledge-transfer activities. FACTrepreneurial included entrepreneurship training, pitching, innovation activities and digital entrepreneurship development. The variety of activities illustrates why strategic deployment in a faculty requires coordination across academic and non-academic processes.

The international and community-engaged initiatives also demonstrate the importance of reciprocal relationships. Govindaraju (2025) argues that institutionalising SULAM requires alignment with curriculum, regular evaluation, educator readiness and policy support. Similarly, long-term service-learning research indicates that authentic engagement can develop transferable skills, but sustained benefits depend on programme design and continuity (Yang et al., 2026). These considerations support the inclusion of stakeholder participation and organisational capability as enabling conditions in the proposed framework.

Deployment in ADLI terms concerns both reach and consistency. The institutional documents indicate that the projects were registered and monitored through formal systems, rather than being managed solely through informal personal arrangements. This does not eliminate the dependence on committed individuals, but it increases visibility and allows leaders to compare implementation against agreed plans.

Evidence Generation and Monitoring

FPN used a layered monitoring approach. Documented mechanisms included SAP and UiSMS records, Power BI, ICAN dashboards, PRIME reporting, faculty governance meetings, strategic planning meetings, risk management meetings and Management Review meetings (MKSP) (FPN, 2025). These various mechanisms served different purposes. Digital systems provided visibility over project status, while formal meetings enabled interpretation, challenge and decision making. The monitoring cycle operated at more than one frequency. Strategic planning and risk meetings were conducted periodically, including quarterly reviews. Meanwhile, MKSP meetings considered quality objectives, strategic progress, customer feedback and internal audit information on a six-monthly basis. Annual internal audits and self-assessment added another layer of review. This combination reduced reliance on an end-of-year evaluation and allowed issues to be considered while projects were still active.

The quarterly progress of the three main projects demonstrates the role of staged monitoring in making implementation progress visible. Project complexity, timing and availability of resources also helped to drive project completion. At the broader institutional level, FPN achieved a UiTM I-Score of 94.2% in 2024, placing third among the UiTM faculties, and maintained a 6 STAR performance. These broader performance indicators are provided purely to give context on the faculty's overall performance environment. They are not presented as evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed framework, nor are they interpreted as outcomes driven by the three strategic projects discussed in this paper.

Evidence generation extended beyond project completion rates and institution-level performance scores. Post-mortem discussions, participant surveys, customer feedback, student reflections and social impact documentation were also used. The wider evidence base is important for community-engaged programmes because completion percentages do not show whether participants found the programme relevant or whether learning and social outcomes were sustained. Fu and Sung (2026) similarly caution that standardised quality measures may fail to recognise deeper evidence arising from heterogeneous community contexts.

Risk information formed part of the monitoring system. Documented challenges included insufficient alumni participation, funding constraints and weaknesses in impact reporting. By linking risk review with project monitoring, the faculty could move from observing a shortfall to considering why the shortfall occurred and what intervention was required. This connection between performance and risk strengthens the Check stage because it supports diagnosis rather than simple variance reporting.

Reflective Review and Organisational Learning

Monitoring becomes organisational learning only when evidence is interpreted. FPN used management and strategic review forums to discuss progress, risks, feedback and follow-up actions. Post-mortem sessions and stakeholder feedback created additional opportunities to identify weaknesses in programme design or delivery. The existence of several review channels also allowed formal performance information to be supplemented with operational experience. Some responses reflected single-loop learning. For example, project teams could intensify communication, adjust timing or increase follow-up when participation was below expectation. These interventions sought to close a performance gap without changing the underlying strategic objective. Such corrections are necessary for operational control and may be sufficient

when the original approach remains appropriate. Other responses reflected deeper learning because they changed processes or structures. The faculty documented the appointment of alumni and programme coordinators, improvements to industry and community engagement procedures, stronger alumni matching, the development of student reflection modules and the integration of programme outcomes into SAP and PRIME (FPN, 2025). These actions went beyond increasing activities as they improved how later programmes would be governed, documented and reviewed.

The introduction of reflection modules is particularly relevant to community-engaged learning. Basson et al. (2026) show that structured reflection, repeated engagement and iterative action-research cycles can strengthen the development of citizenship competencies in accounting studies. Within FPN, student reflection served both an educational and managerial purpose. It supported student learning outcomes while generating evidence that could inform future programme design. Review also supported collective interpretation. Crossan et al. (1999) emphasise that organisational learning requires insights to move beyond individuals through interpretation, integration and institutionalisation. A project leader may understand why an activity underperformed, but organisational learning occurs only when the insight is communicated, accepted and incorporated into wider practice. Formal review meetings therefore functioned as potential bridges between local experience and faculty-level decision making.

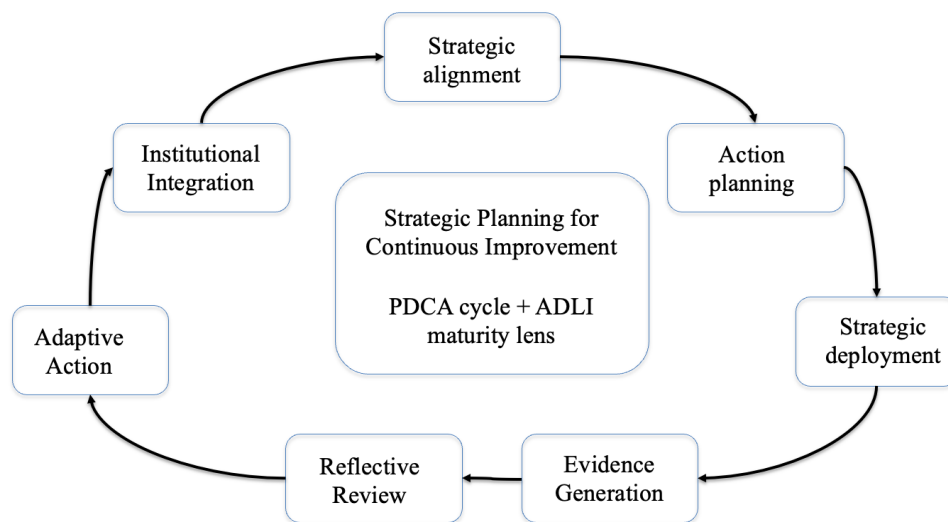
Adaptive Action and Institutional Integration

Adaptive action represents the point at which review changes practice. Documented actions included revising procedures, strengthening digital reporting and introducing mechanisms for more systematic reflection and outcome tracking. These actions illustrate the Act stage of PDCA and the Learning dimension of ADLI. Institutional integration occurred when improvements were incorporated into established systems and future planning. FPN reported that outcomes were integrated into SAP and PRIME, while corrective actions were discussed through MKSP and faculty executive mechanisms. Digital tools such as impact trackers and dashboards improved central visibility, and revised procedures provided a more stable basis for later implementation. Integration matters because an improvement that remains dependent on one project team may disappear when personnel change. Embedding the change into procedures, systems, roles and future action plans create organisational memory. This corresponds with the institutionalisation stage described by Crossan et al. (1999) and the Integration dimension in the Baldrige approach. The institutional evidence also suggests that integration is not complete or permanent. Strategic priorities, stakeholders and reporting requirements continue to evolve. Accordingly, institutional integration should return to strategic alignment, where accumulated learning informs the next cycle. The framework is therefore recursive rather than linear.

Proposed Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework

The literature and institutional illustration support a seven-stage framework. The framework begins with strategic alignment and ends with institutional integration, which then informs a revised alignment process. It is designed to explain how a faculty moves from preparing plans to developing a sustained learning capability.

The seven stages are sequential but recursive in logic. Strategic alignment defines the priorities to be addressed, while action planning translates these into projects, responsibilities, measures, and resources. Strategic deployment translates the planned approach into practice, producing quantitative and qualitative evidence. Reflective review interprets this evidence and identifies the causes of performance gaps or successful outcomes. Adaptive action translates this learning into changes in activities, processes, or governance. Institutional integration embeds successful changes into established systems, roles, and future plans. The accumulated learning then informs the next cycle of strategic alignment, making the framework recursive rather than linear.



Enabling conditions: leadership and governance, stakeholder engagement, digital performance information, risk management and organisational culture

Figure 1: Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework

Source: Authors' conceptualisation.

Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment considers whether a proposed initiative clearly links to faculty priorities, university direction, and stakeholder needs. Not all external demand requires a new project, so this phase also involves decisions. Leaders need to determine which issues are strategically important and whether they can be addressed by the faculty's existing capacities and resources.

Action Planning

Once a strategic priority has been identified, it needs to be translated into an operational plan. This involves specifying the activities, responsibilities, resources, timelines, and risks involved. The evidence that will later be used to assess progress should also be determined at this stage. This may include both output measures and evidence of outcomes, particularly for initiatives involving students, communities, and external partners.

Strategic Deployment

Strategic deployment considers whether the planned approach is actually carried out across the relevant units and stakeholders. The emphasis is on visible ownership, coordination,

communication, and access to resources. A project's formal launch does not necessarily imply that the planned approach has been fully implemented, what matters is whether implementation is consistent across those responsible for delivery.

Evidence Generation

Evidence generation records what happened during implementation and what resulted from it. Depending on the project, the evidence may include milestone progress, participation, cost, satisfaction, risk information, stakeholder feedback, reflections, and social impact. The purpose is to provide a reliable foundation for further review and decision-making, not just to fill a dashboard.

Reflective Review

Reflective review interprets the evidence. Results are compared with expectations, but the review should also examine reasons performance differed, how stakeholders experienced the activity, and whether the original approach remains appropriate. Dashboards may reveal a variance, but understanding the reason behind it still requires discussion, contextual knowledge, and professional judgment.

Adaptive Action

Adaptive action turns the findings from review into a decision about what should change. The response may involve reallocating resources, revising a process or measure, changing a timeline, redesigning a programme or modifying governance arrangements. The key point is that the action should address the identified cause rather than simply increasing the level of activity.

Institutional Integration

Institutional integration occurs when useful changes are carried beyond the individual project and embedded into later plans, procedures, roles or monitoring systems. Within FPN, this can be seen when programme outcomes are incorporated into subsequent SAPs and PRIME and reviewed through Mesyuarat Pengurusan Eksekutif (MPE; Executive Management Meeting) and Mesyuarat Kajian Semula Pengurusan (MKSP; Management Review Meeting). Integration connects the completion of one improvement cycle with the next by allowing accumulated learning to influence future strategic alignment and action planning.

Table 2: Seven Stages Of The Strategic Planning For Continuous Improvement Framework

Stage	Main Purpose	Key Evidence or Decision	Illustrative FPN Practice
Strategic Alignment	Connect priorities with institutional direction and stakeholder needs	Strategic issue and rationale	Alignment of PSFPN 2024 with UiTM and national priorities

Action Planning	Translate direction into projects, targets, responsibilities and resources	SAP, indicators, risks and evidence requirements	Dynamic Linkages, Impactful USR/KTP and FACTrepreneurial plans
Strategic Deployment	Implement the approach across relevant units and partners	Ownership, coordination and implementation records	Project directors, ICAN, MASMED, lecturers, students, alumni and strategic partners
Evidence Generation	Generate reliable and quantitative and qualitative performance information	Progress, feedback, satisfaction, risk and impact evidence	UiSMS, Power BI, ICAN, PRIME, surveys and reflections
Reflective Review	Interpret performance and identify gaps	Variance analysis, dialogue and stakeholder interpretation	Strategic meetings, risk reviews, MKSP and post-mortems
Adaptive Action	Change activities, processes, roles or measures	Corrective, developmental or innovative response	New coordinators, revised procedures, reflection modules and better matching
Institutional Integration	Embed learning into future systems and plans	Revised SAP, SOP, roles, systems and budgets	Integration of outcomes into SAP and PRIME and review through MPE/MKSP

Source: Authors' conceptualisation based on FPN institutional evidence.

The seven stages are supported by five cross-cutting conditions identified from the institutional evidence: leadership and governance, stakeholder engagement, performance information systems, risk management and a culture of organisational learning. These are not separate stages because they operate across the entire improvement cycle.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretical Implications

The framework contributes to strategic planning literature by specifying the mechanisms through which planning may become continuous improvement. Rather than treating implementation as a single link between planning and performance, it separates evidence generation, reflective review, adaptive action, and institutional integration. This distinction is important because each stage can fail independently. An institution may collect evidence but not review it, review it but not act, or act without embedding change. Therefore, the theoretical contribution is not just the juxtaposition of PDCA and ADLI, but the articulation of the mechanisms that link performance evidence to organisational learning and institutionalization. The framework also clarifies the complementary roles of PDCA and ADLI. PDCA explains the recurring movement of improvement. ADLI explains the maturity, reach, and institutional alignment of the underlying process. Combining them therefore offers a fuller explanation than

using either alone. The Act stage may improve one project, while Integration asks whether the learning has become part of the institution. A further contribution concerns organisational learning. The framework positions reflective review as a bridge between information and action, while institutional integration represents the movement from local experience to organisational memory. This connects quality-improvement practice with the learning processes described by Argyris and Schon (1997) and Crossan et al. (1999).

Practical Implications

At faculty level, the framework can be used to help identify whether a strategic project is breaking down. A delayed project may point to a deployment problem, while a completed project with weak stakeholder outcomes may suggest weaknesses in evidence, review or project design. Therefore, the framework encourages leaders to inquire about what was learned from an activity and what changed as a result, in addition to whether the activity was finished. Strategic planning coordinators should distinguish between monitoring completion and evaluating effectiveness. A completion percentage is useful for identifying delays, but it should be supplemented with evidence of quality, stakeholder experience, and outcomes. This is particularly important for SULAM, USR, and community programmes, where meaningful impact may not be captured through the quantity of activities alone. Quality units should document the connection between evidence and action. Meeting minutes and dashboards should not record performance but also identify causes, agreed interventions, responsible persons and follow-up dates. This creates an auditable learning trail and reduces the risk that the same issues recur across planning cycles. Project owners should be encouraged to report difficulties early. A culture that treats every shortcoming as individual failure may produce defensive reporting. Leaders can maintain accountability while framing credible problem identification as a contribution to improvement. This requires clear expectations, constructive review and visible follow-through.

Digital systems should be integrated rather than multiplied without coordination. Separate platforms may serve legitimate purposes, but fragmented reporting can increase workload and create inconsistent definitions. Institutions should clarify which system is the authoritative source for each measure and how information moves between project, faculty and university levels. Finally, successful improvement should influence the next strategic plan. Newly appointed coordinators, revised procedures, improved indicators and effective programme designs should not remain as informal knowledge. They should be reflected in future SAPs, role descriptions, budgets, risk registers and quality objectives. This is the point at which continuous improvement becomes institutional capability.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the proposed framework. First, the institutional illustration is drawn from one faculty at UiTM. It helps to demonstrate how the proposed stages may operate in practice, but it cannot show that the same relationships will occur in other faculties or universities. Second, the analysis relies mainly on institutional documents. Such documents are useful for tracing planning, monitoring, and follow-up activities, but they may record successful practices more clearly than unsuccessful ones. The paper also does not include interviews with project owners, students, alumni, community partners, or senior management. As a result, the analysis cannot capture how different stakeholders understood the same monitoring evidence or review process.

Future research could therefore examine the framework in different institutional settings and over more than one planning cycle. Comparative case studies may show whether some stages are more difficult to sustain than others. Interviews could also explore how project teams interpret performance evidence and whether formal review meetings actually lead to changes in practice. To determine whether corrective measures implemented in one cycle are retained in subsequent plans, processes, or systems, a longitudinal study would be helpful. Quantitative work could then investigate whether stronger links between planning, evidence, review, and action are associated with more consistent institutional outcomes. Digital monitoring also deserves separate attention. The availability of more data does not necessarily improve organisational learning. Future studies could distinguish between data availability, data quality, analytical capability, and the authority of staff to act on the information produced.

Conclusion

Strategic planning contributes to continuous improvement only when institutions establish effective connections between plans, implementation evidence, reflective review and subsequent action. The presence of performance indicators, dashboards and meetings is not sufficient if the information generated through these mechanisms does not influence organisational decisions. This paper proposed a seven-stage Strategic Planning for Continuous Improvement Framework comprising strategic alignment, action planning, strategic deployment, evidence generation, reflective review, adaptive action and institutional integration. By combining PDCA and ADLI, the framework explains both the cyclical nature of improvement and the institutional maturity required to sustain it. The FPN illustration shows how strategic projects, distributed ownership, digital monitoring, governance reviews, stakeholder feedback and corrective interventions may operate as components of an integrated improvement system. The documented practices suggest that the faculty moved beyond end-of-year activity reporting by using periodic monitoring, risk review, post-mortem discussion and procedural changes. At the same time, the illustration does not establish causality and should be understood as a context-specific example.

The central implication is that strategic planning should be treated as a learning architecture. Planning establishes direction, but evidence tests whether the direction and delivery remain appropriate. Review gives meaning to the evidence; action converts elements of learning into change, and integration protects that change from being lost. When these connections are maintained, strategic planning can move from a compliance exercise to a sustained organisational capability.

-
- Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Malaysia for providing the resources and institutional support that made this research possible. The authors also extend their appreciation to colleagues and peers for their valuable insights, constructive comments, and continuous encouragement, all of which have significantly improved the quality of this paper.
- Funding Statement:** This research received publication support from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Puncak Alam, Malaysia. The financial support was provided to facilitate the publication of this paper.
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Modern Education (IJMOE).
- Ethics Statement:** This study did not involve any human participants, animals, or sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. [Nazreen Sahol Hamid] was responsible for the conceptualisation and overall supervision of the study. [Mohd Fairuz Adnan, Halil Paino and Farid Wajdi Mohamad Isa are responsible to ensure that the manuscript presents a clear, logical, and coherent flow of ideas, with each section systematically aligned to support the overall argument and objectives of the paper. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.
-

References

- Adnan, M. F., Sahol Hamid, N., Paino, H., & Mohamad Isa, F. W. (2025). From strategy to impact: A case study on strategic planning for global competitiveness. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(9), 8401–8413. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000686>
- Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1997). Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective. *Reis*, (77/78), 345-348.
- Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. (2023). 2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework: Proven leadership and management practices for high performance (Education). U.S. Department of Commerce, National Institute of Standards and Technology. <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige>
- Basson, R., Fortuin, G. S., Malan, N., Patterson, M., & Pietersen, L. A. (2026). Developing citizenship competencies in accounting students through experiential learning: An action research study. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 24(3), 101442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2026.101442>
- Bryson, J. M. (2018). Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement (5th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Burke, S. M., Moloney, D. F., Rísquez, A., Cuniffe, C., McInerney, C., Breen, M., Shee, B., Brady, S., Kennedy, M.-C., & Ledwith, A. (2026). Designing student-centred digital learning for belonging, engagement and employability: A case study of the University of Limerick's transformative digital ecosystem. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ILS-09-2025-0171>
- Crossan, M. M., Lane, H. W., & White, R. E. (1999). An organizational learning framework: From intuition to institution. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3), 522–537. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1999.2202135>
- Deming, W. E. (1986). Principles for transformation. *Out of the Crisis*, 18, 96.
- Dooris, M. J., Kelley, J. M., & Trainer, J. F. (2004). Strategic planning in higher education. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2004(123), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.115>
- Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. (2024a). FPN PI 2024 achievement (December 2024) [Unpublished internal spreadsheet].
- Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. (2024b). Strategic action plan 2024: ICAN (Dynamic Linkages) [Internal planning document].
- Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. (2024c). Strategic action plan 2024: ICAN (Impactful USR/KTP Program) [Internal planning document].
- Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. (2024d). Strategic action plan 2024: MASMED (FACTrepreneurial) [Internal planning document].
- Fu, Y.-C., & Sung, S.-M. (2026). Context-sensitive quality assurance in USR-driven capstone design courses: A multiple-case study of industry- and culture-driven fields. *Quality Assurance in Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2026-0125>
- George, B., Walker, R. M., & Monster, J. (2019). Does strategic planning improve organizational performance? A meta-analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 79(6), 810–819. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13104>
- Govindaraju, V. (2025). Bridging academia and society: Institutionalizing Service-Learning Malaysia (SULAM) within Malaysian higher education frameworks. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(8), 7461–7479. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.908000619>

- Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2008). *The execution premium: Linking strategy to operations for competitive advantage*. Harvard Business Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1994). The fall and rise of strategic planning. *Harvard Business Review*, 72(1), 107–114.
- Moen, R. D., & Norman, C. L. (2010). Circling back: Clearing up myths about the Deming cycle and seeing how it keeps evolving. *Quality Progress*, 43(11), 22–28.
- Mohd Naufal, W. N. A. D., Syed Aris, S. R., Wahi, R., Mohamed, A. M. D., Zulkipli, Z. A., Awang Hashim, R., Elianawati, M. S., & Mohd Yusof, M. M. (2024). Key success factors for implementation of Service-Learning Malaysia University for Society (SULAM) projects at higher education level: Community perspectives. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 20(1), 152–172. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v20i1.25824>
- Raiden, A., Goumaa, R., & Mazhar, M. U. (2025). Embedding ethics, responsibility and sustainability in the curriculum within a masters in management programme. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-07-2024-0441>
- Trainer, J. F. (2004). Models and tools for strategic planning. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2004(123), 129–138. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.127>
- UiTM, P. J. I., & dan Alumni, K. (2025). AKNC 2025 Pejabat Jaringan, Industri, Komuniti & Alumni: jaringan alumni, komuniti dan kesukarelawan. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/134041/>
- Wolf, C., & Floyd, S. W. (2017). Strategic planning research: Toward a theory-driven agenda. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1754–1788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206313478185>
- Yang, M., Harbor, J., Li, B., & Nikiema, J. (2026). Infusing authenticity into a service-learning program: Examining long-term impacts on professional development. *Education + Training*, 68(10), 156–181. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-08-2025-0597>