

# Working towards utopia: The journey of a university's planning cycle

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"If you actually succeed in creating a utopia, you've created a world without conflict, in which everything is perfect. And if there's no conflict, there are no stories worth telling - or reading!"  
Veronica Roth, American Author, Born 1988

At La Trobe University between 2013 and 2017, we implemented an ambitious strategy to secure the University's position to invest in its future resources, including staffing and infrastructure. The organisation underwent a major restructure in 2014 in order to facilitate this agenda. It also recognized that it needed to adapt the strategic planning cycle to achieve its ambitions; including the student load, budget and business planning cycles.

The University has made significant steps towards a more informed planning cycle and the alignment of many divisions and their expertise to connect the operational needs of the institution in line with its strategic vision. These include marketing, finance, planning, the international office, infrastructure and operations and the academic units of the organisation. What had been sequential planning has become more aligned reducing the time and resources required to plan the company's business as usual activities and strategic initiatives. Further alignment of the business and budget planning cycles occurred in 2016 and this has improved the quality of the planning outcomes.

This paper will share the lessons learned along this journey and how steps towards aligning these important processes in any company cycle have been achieved and what we are doing next. We explore the notion that working in-conjunction with each other would increase accuracy and reduce the amount of time and resources required to do so. We don't claim to have all the answers or a magic system. What we do have is some simple ideas and an awareness that all the processes and systems in the world can't beat knowledgeable people working together productively.