

The Strategic Kernel Diagnostic
A Higher Education Leadership Tool

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This diagnostic is based on the "Strategic Kernel" framework developed by [Richard Rumelt](#). It is designed to help higher education leaders, faculty, and trustees distinguish between a coordinated strategy and a bureaucratic "to-do list."

Section 1: The Diagnosis

Rate 1–5: Does the strategic plan identify a specific, high-stakes institutional challenge (e.g., a looming demographic cliff, a failed revenue model, or administrative stagnation), or is it a generic "Vision" statement about excellence?

Score: _____

Section 2: The Guiding Policy

Rate 1–5: Is there a clear philosophy for overcoming that challenge (e.g., "Administrative Compression" or "Focus on Research Core"), or is it a collection of "Sunday words" and jargon that avoids taking a stance?

Score: _____

Section 3: Coherent Action

Rate 1–5: Does the plan outline 3–5 coordinated steps that build on each other to solve the diagnosed problem, or is it a "Dog's Dinner" of 100+ unlinked initiatives?

Score: _____

Section 4: Resource Alignment

Rate 1–5: Has funding been explicitly moved from legacy programs to these new actions, or are these "unfunded mandates" expected to be performed alongside existing duties?

Score: _____

Total Score & Interpretation

- **16–20: Good Strategy.** You have a focused kernel for change. Your institution has made the hard choices necessary for success.
- **10–15: Standard Planning.** You have a list of goals, but you lack a clear "why" and sufficient coordination to move the needle.
- **Below 10: A Dog's Dinner.** Your institution is suffering from the "Initiative Paradox." Activity is being substituted for achievement.