

Relationship between Strategic Planning and Performance of Public Secondary Schools in Kangundo Sub-County, Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract: Many scholars and authors argue that the relationship of strategic planning and performance has not been clearly established and that although strategic planning is not the sole contributor to high organization performance, organizations with excellently executed strategic plans perform better than their counterparts. Issues of contingency, dynamic and complex environment have necessitated strategic planning in organizations. To address the concerns of quality of education provided, the Government of Kenya has made it mandatory for all public secondary schools to develop strategic plans to guide their operations. Whereas many schools have developed strategic plans, how these strategic plans have helped them to improve on their performance is not clear. The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between strategy implementation and performance in public secondary schools in Kangundo Sub-county. The study was conducted in Kangundo Sub County, Machakos County. The target population of the study was 28 principals, 28 deputy principals, 28 senior teachers and 28 boards of management chairpersons in 28 public secondary schools in Kangundo Sub-county. Cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used. A census of all schools was done where in every school, the principal, deputy principal, senior teacher and the chairperson of the board of management was selected. The study had a sample size of 112 respondents and employed structured questionnaires as the instrument for data collection. The reliability and validity of the instrument were enhanced through pilot study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data, which were presented using frequencies, tables, graphs and percentages. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between variables. The study found out that: strategy implementation was found to have the largest impact in school performance.

Keywords: Strategic planning, strategic implementation, organizational performance

I. Introduction

The Kenyan education system runs from early childhood to the primary or elementary education level, to secondary education and finally tertiary education at the college or university levels. The Kenya government endeavors to provide quality education to every Kenyan child irrespective of their social-economic status through initiatives such as Free Primary Education (FPE), Universal Primary Education (UPE), and Education for All (EFA), Free Secondary Education (FSE) and Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE). Basic education embraces ECDE to Secondary school level, (Basic Education act No.14 of 2013). These initiatives have set time limits, for instance, UPE by 2005, EFA by 2015, (Sessional paper No. 1 2005).

The government developed Education Sector Strategic Plan (2003) and set targets outlined in the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005. It then launched KESSP in 2005 which is part of a multi-donor sector wide approach supporting Kenya in its effort to reach its Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015, (Walekhwa, 2008). However, with changes in the political and legal arena propelled by the inauguration of new constitution in 2010, there have been numerous changes in policy, for instance, the implementation agent has changed to National Education Sector Support Program (NESSP) and Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 updated to Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012 with reference to a new Basic Education Act 2013 and the new MOE's strategic plan 2012-2017.

In Kenya education helps push further the government's economic and social agenda by providing a skilled workforce, generating a civilized society and promoting active citizenship, (Basic Education Act, 2013, Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The purpose of public secondary schools in Kenya is to equip learners with knowledge, skills and values to compete in obtaining quality courses and colleges, (Birgen, 2007). Ranking of schools and individual student performance at national, county and sub-county levels has heightened competition among public secondary schools. Stakeholders in education have consequently embraced strategic planning as a management tool to diagnose the competitive environment, allocate resources appropriately and

secure a competitive advantage sustainable over a long period. Hence, the question under debate is whether or not strategic planning improves performance in schools. The controversy on whether the strategic planning improves performance in schools has been ongoing. For instance, Bell (2012) focusing on English schools in the UK examined whether strategic planning and school management was just full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Every organization has an internal and an external environment that are interdependent (Albanese and Van Fleet, 2013). The continuous evolution and interaction of internal environment components and the turbulent and dynamic nature of the external environment occasioned by constant changes in competition, economy, technology, political-legal aspects and social-cultural-demographic factors, has made strategic management popular in comprehending an organization's strategic position and strategic choices in pursuit of excellent performance (Pearce II and Robinson, 2009). The contingency theory postulates that organizations are open systems and there is no one best way of managing an organization (Burnes, 2010). This is because rapid environmental changes present them with various opportunities, threats and constraints (Barney, 2007).

Strategic planning practices in Kenya commenced slowly and gradually back in the 1960s but are presently gaining currency and popularity (Yabs, 2007). The public sector finds the concepts of strategy and strategic planning just as important as in commercial firms and hence public secondary schools in Kangundo Sub-County are required to formulate strategic plans in tandem with the MOE's strategic plan in order to foster the government's agenda to provide every Kenyan child with the right to quality education and training (Birgen, 2007). Besides adoption of strategic planning as a government's policy, the dwindling resources coupled with the ever changing and highly competitive environment have made strategic planning a necessary practice (Gode, 2009).

Strategic planning is expected to positively influence performance (academic and non-academic) because it aids in selection of strategies that enable organizations to best allocate and exploit their resources and strengths relative to opportunities in their external environment (Akinyi, 2010). This makes strategic planning in Public Secondary Schools in Kangundo Sub-County inevitable because they can only attract quality students and receive support from their stakeholders if they meet acceptable standards of performance.

Strategic planning aims at making strategic decisions or strategic choices through formulation of mission and vision, setting of policies, goals and objectives and identifying means of achieving those objectives. Organizations engage in strategic planning in order to achieve clarity of future direction, design internal action approaches, make proper choices and priorities, deal effectively with organizational changes and uncertainties in external environment, build team work and expertise based on resources, processes and people and develop effective strategies to improve organizational performance, (Cole, 2004, Peng, 2007). Performance is the goal of every organization; it refers to the end result of activities, while strategic planning aims to improve these results. Ansoff (1990) and Yabs (2007) records that strategic planning has gained popularity since the 1960s. This is because of its perceived relevance in diagnosing the prevailing competitive and turbulent business environment and enabling appropriate resource allocation to gear the firm towards achievement of its short-term objectives and long-term goals which determine a firm's performance level in the markets and industries it operates, (Barney, 2007, Kotler, 2003).

The concept of performance is vital in all organizations whether commercial, profit-making or Not-for-profit organizations, private or public sector, (Johnson, *et al.*, 2008). Organizational performance is a measure of the extent to which the organization's goals and objectives have been achieved. Such measure of achievement informs all the stakeholders of the extent to which we are succeeding in the business we are in. Based on their context, different organizations use different modes of performance. (Mazzarol and Rebound, 2009), notes that, organizational performance can be measured as achieving sustainable growth over time using such indicators as annual turnover, the number of employees, size of assets and equity in the balance sheet, market share and profitability. Kotler (2003) defines performance as the process of putting plans into action for the accomplishment of set objectives. However, Bolo, Muturia and Oeba(2010), says that firm performance refers to how well or badly a firm is performing both financially and non-financially thus exclusive use of financial achievements or indicators as the sole yardstick to determine organizational performance would be lopsided because organizations desire to achieve broad objectives. As such, Thompson, *et al.*, (2007) suggests that, use of a balanced scorecard for measuring company performance that tracks the achievement of both financial objectives and strategic objectives is optimal.

Measurement of performance in a school set-up will therefore include academic excellence, land, infrastructure development, discipline and school culture, stakeholder satisfaction, financial stability and excellence in non-academic activities. Firm performance is therefore a very essential aspect of a firm because as March and Sutton (2007), put it, performance comparisons become a basis for evaluating executives, making decisions about resource allocation of human and other resources, for writing history and for stimulating arrogance and shame.

The ministry's strategic plan is cascaded down to individual public secondary schools that are expected to enact a strategic plan in tandem with the Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan. Evidently, strategic planning in public secondary schools is largely determined by external pressures such as policy. Pressure on existing resources, desire for quality, challenge of rapidly changing policy and the highly competitive environment in the industry makes strategic planning relevant. As Les Bell (2012) notes, strategic planning is a key management process that draws together institutional values and goals and provides a framework for the quality of provision and the deployment of resources. The question of concern is therefore, whether strategic planning in public secondary schools leads to improved performance.

It is through performance of strategy that an organization can figure out its future and benefit from the opportunities the future provides. The purpose of strategy is to provide directional cues to the organization that permit it to achieve its objectives while responding to the opportunities and threats in the environment (Pearson and Robin 2007). This means that the whole essence of a strategy and strategic management is to address the implications of the external environmental changes to the organization's plans, objectives, vision, and mission, as well as resource deployment. Hence, it involves focus on the horizon as opposed to the bottom line; it is transformative, long term, and geared towards organizational adaptation to new ways of doing things. Strategic implications emanate from the external environment, and as such the key role of an organization's management is anticipation.

This is fundamentally critical because this change yields opportunities and threats to the organization. Further, these strategic implications result in the change of the assumed future state of affairs conceptualized in the preparation of the organization's goals and objectives, due to the new set of challenges and/or opportunities posed to the organization. Strategy performance can also be seen as a series of interventions concerning organizational structures, key personnel actions, and control systems to ensure desired standards of performance are met. It is an iterative process of implementing strategies, policies, programs and action plans that allows a strategic to utilize its resources to take advantage of opportunities in the competitive environment (Harrington, 2006).

Many of the studies on the relationship between strategic planning and firm performance were done between 1970s and early 1990s, in the developed economies. These studies focused on the direct relationship between strategic planning and firm performance. Although the studies within the African context by Woodburn (1984), Adegbite (1986) and Fubara (1986) noted that firms that practiced strategic planning recorded better performance compared to non-planners, their focus, however, was on the formality of planning rather than the link between planning and firm performance. It is noted that the past studies did not give attention to the individual steps that make up the strategic planning process. It is perceived that the manner and extent to which each of the strategic planning steps is addressed could have implications on the realization of the expected corporate goals.

Research Objective

To establish the relationship between strategy implementation and performance of public secondary schools in Kangundo Sub-County.

II. Literature Review

According to Mintzberg (2004), Strategic Plan Implementation is the process that follows immediately after strategic plan formulation and entails the action point of strategic management process. It involves all the stakeholders of an organization and should be well handled because it is the actualization point without which strategic plans are devoid of their value addition aspect. A strategic plan is of little use to an organization without a means of putting it into place. In fact, implementation is essential part of the strategic planning process, and organizations that develop strategic plans must expect to include a process for applying the plan. The specific implementation process can vary from organization to organization, dependent largely on the details of the actual strategic plan, but some basic steps can assist in the process and ensure that implementation is successful and strategic plan is effective.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) state that implementation could not be successful if it is divorced from planning. They further argue that good implementation must begin in the actual planning of policy. Policy makers tend to divorce themselves from the actual implementation of their policy and as a result they misestimate the amount of time and detail that is required to be successful. This comes in many forms. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) note leaders make decisions and in thinking about the finish line, often fail to contemplate all the intricacies of getting there. They expect those under them to figure out the sequences of events. Implementation is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary. There must always be evaluation and tweaking occurring for implementation to be successful. This must be an ongoing process or the project will hit a wall and may not recover. The longer the players take to implement the policy the more difficult it is to be successful. The key to a successful strategy planning implementation is by aligning the initiatives, having a full

and active executive support, widespread perceived need for the strategic planning, effective communication, through engaging employees, thorough organizational planning and competitive analysis, aligning budgets and performance, and by monitoring and adapting.

Strategy implementation involves organization of the firm's resources and motivation of the staff to achieve objectives. The environmental conditions facing many firms have changed rapidly. Today's global competitive environment is complex, dynamic, and largely unpredictable. To deal with this unprecedented level of change, a lot of thinking has gone into the issue of how strategies are best formulated. Strategic management is about managing the future, and effective strategy formulation is crucial, as it directs the attention and actions of an organization, even if in some cases actual implemented strategy can be very different from what was initially intended, planned or thought. The assessment of strategy formulation processes becomes crucial for practitioners and researchers alike in order to conduct and evaluate different formulation processes (Olson et al. 2005). According to Wheelen and Hunger (2008), strategy implementation is the process by which objectives, strategies and policies are put into action through the development of programs, budgets and procedures. Finally, evaluation and control process seeks to ensure that a firm is achieving what is set out to achieve by comparing performance with desired results, revealing the performance gap and providing feedback necessary for the management to take correct action (Yabs, 2007).

According to David (2003) the human element of strategic implementation plays a key role in successful implementation and involves both managers and employees of the organization. Both parties should directly participate in implementation decisions and communication that play a key role in ensuring that this occurs. Business performance is influenced by this human element of strategic implementation. Through providing performance incentives to employees during the implementation phase, it is suggested by David (2003) that business performance will be positively influenced. Strategic decisions determine the organizational relations to its external environment, encompass the entire organization, depend on input from all of functional areas in the organization, have a direct influence on the administrative and operational activities, and are vitally important to long-term health of an organization (Shirley, 1982). According to Schermerhorn (1989), strategies must be well formulated and implemented in order to attain organizational objectives. Therefore, the ability of strategy to lead a firm to success in performance starts way before implementation; during formulation.

According to Pride and Ferrell, (2003) implementation is an important component of the strategic planning process. It has been defined as "the process that turns strategies and plans into actions to accomplish organizational objectives". It addresses the, who, where, when, and how to carry out organizational activities successfully to achieve better results (Kotler et al. 2003). Implementing strategic change is a double-edged sword because it simultaneously generates expected performance gain and unexpected performance loss (Brown 2005; Kennedy, Goolsby, and Arnould 2003). When unexpected performance loss dominates or drains away expected performance gain, change becomes ineffective. Moreover, the coexistence of performance gain and loss is likely to yield confounded evidence for strategic change outcomes. Organizations may fail to maximize the performance benefits of strategic change because they either do not detect the presence of performance loss or fail to diagnose and mitigate the loss. It is not surprising that extant research provides evidence of equivocal effects of change that are either positive (Siguaw, Brown, and Widing 1994) or negative (Harris and Ogbonna 2000).

In his study of "aspects of formulation and implementation of strategic plans in Kenya", Aosa (1992) surveyed 51 large private manufacturing firms through a survey. Using questionnaires and a drop and pick method, Aosa concluded that management was the key factors that influenced strategic plans formulation and implementation. The scholar also noted that an effective implementation process required a collective approach to culture and communication while keeping clear communication channels and realigning firm resources so that strategic plans are not halted by lack or inadequate implementation resources.

Dooley, Fryxell and Judge (2000) indicated that strategic implementation has a distinct relationship with various organizational elements like performance. Dooley, Fryxell and Judge (2000) further endorsed that there is a positive association between strategic consensus and firm performance. In developing policies during the implementation process, methods, procedures, rules, forms, and administrative practices are established to achieve the desired objectives. According to David (2003), strategies which are implemented within an organization should support the culture associated with the firm, if there is going to be successful in ensuring enhanced performance in an organization. The proposed strategy should preserve, emphasize, and enhance the culture, in accordance with the culture supporting the proposed strategy (David 2003). Therefore, strategies to be implemented must be consistent with organizational culture to realise the desired organizational performance results. Further, conflict management also plays an integral role within the implementation process.

Although strategic plan implementation is perceived to be associated with good firm performance, the organizational leadership could influence the attainment of anticipated results. Aosa (1992) noted that participating in the implementation of strategic plans varied with some companies exhibiting high participation while others had low participation as dictated upon by their leadership style. Leaders should focus their

members in the same direction with CEOs being at the forefront to provide vision, initiative, motivation and inspiration (Ombina, Omoni & Sipili., 2010).

Mintzberg (2004) argues that a good implementation of strategic plan is dependent on the learning and development environment for employees who are the true foot soldiers of implementation. This learning orientation requires emphasis on openness, collaboration, equity, trust, continuous improvement and risk taking. In order to attain this, there has to be adaptation to changing environmental conditions attainable under good leadership that generate clear communication to the followers with confidence and approval from the stakeholders. The world of NGOs is experiencing stiff competition for the limited funding sources from both the West and East necessitating the need to explore how management styles would affect implementation of their strategic plans, and achievement of set strategies to gain a competitive edge and remain credible to continue accessing donor funds.

III. Data Analysis/ Findings

According to David (2003), the human element of strategic implementation plays a key role in successful implementation and involves both managers and employees of the organization. Both parties should directly participate in implementation decisions and communication that play a key role in ensuring that this occurs. Strategy formulation alone cannot guarantee success in a firm without putting it into practice. Thus strategy implementation plays a significant role in the outcome of a strategic plan. Wheelen and Hunger (2008), view implementation as the process by which objectives, strategies and policies are put into action through the development of programs, budgets and procedures. In this study, strategy implementation was assessed by focusing on the extent to which schools were committed to the process and the emphasis on specific implementation activities. These were assessed on a five point scale and the extent of practices analyzed using the statistical means as shown on the Table.

In the process of implementing strategic plans, schools were found to have their Mission vision, goals and values clearly written and displayed in visible areas in the schools ($\mu = 4.54$, $\sigma = 0.92$). Top management support was also good and favorable for smooth implementation of strategic plans since, the Boards of Management were also found to be highly supportive in strategy implementation rated at ($\mu = 4.33$, $\sigma = 0.88$) and so was the school management team at ($\mu = 4.14$, $\sigma = 0.91$). In most schools steps and activities in strategy implementation process were kept simple thus easy to implement ($\mu = 4.09$, $\sigma = 0.76$). Communication channels in implementation of strategic activities were also rated high in schools at ($\mu = 4.00$, $\sigma = 0.98$). Mintzberg (2004) argues that a good implementation of strategic plan is dependent on the learning and development environment for employees who are the true foot soldiers of implementation. This learning orientation requires emphasis on openness, collaboration, equity, trust, continuous improvement and risk taking. In order to attain this, there has to be adaptation to changing environmental conditions attainable under good leadership that generate clear communication to the followers with confidence and approval from the stakeholders.

During strategy implementation in schools, lessons learnt were used in improving strategic plans by modifying the strategic goals, objectives and activities to a large extent ($\mu = 3.97$, $\sigma = 0.84$). Further, it was revealed that strategic activities were cascaded into individual responsibilities ($\mu = 3.97$, $\sigma = 1.01$) for easy and coordinated strategy implementation. The strategy implementation teams in schools also ensured that there was a sustained momentum in implementation of strategic plans to a large extent ($\mu = 3.95$, $\sigma = 1.00$).

Respondents ranked moderate other strategy implementation practices such as to management of change brought about by new strategy at ($\mu = 3.66$, $\sigma = 0.95$), tracking of strategy implementation activities at ($\mu = 3.63$, $\sigma = 1.05$) and the provision of incentives to the strategy implementation team ($\mu = 3.59$, $\sigma = 1.12$). The least scores in strategy implementation in schools were realized in the timely provision of resources critical in implementing strategic plans rated at ($\mu = 3.41$, $\sigma = 1.16$). All the strategy implementation activities were rated above average. These findings are in line with Aosa (1992) who concluded that management was the key factors that influenced strategic plans formulation and implementation. The scholar also noted that an effective implementation process required a collective approach to culture and communication while keeping clear communication channels and realigning firm resources so that strategic plans are not halted by lack or inadequate implementation resources

IV. Conclusion

The strategy implementation phase had the highest significant impact on school performance compared to the other phases. A unit improvement in strategy implementation translated to 0.335 times improvement in school performance. However, there were indications of shortage of resources for strategy implementation.

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Tables and Figures

Table. Strategy Implementation Practices

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mission vision, goals and values are clearly written in visible areas	94	1.00	5.00	4.54	0.92
Communication on strategic activities is adequately done	94	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.98
Board of management is highly supportive in strategy implementation	94	2.00	5.00	4.33	0.88
There is a sustained momentum in implementation of strategic plans	94	1.00	5.00	3.95	1.00
Strategy implementation process is kept as simple	94	2.00	5.00	4.09	0.76
Strategic activities are cascaded into individual responsibilities	94	1.00	5.00	3.97	1.01
Resources for implementing strategic activities are availed on time	94	1.00	5.00	3.41	1.16
Proper tracking of strategy implementation activities	94	1.00	5.00	3.63	1.05
School management is committed to strategy implementation	94	1.00	5.00	4.14	0.91
Lessons learnt during strategy implementation are incorporated in improving strategic plans	94	2.00	5.00	3.97	0.84
Smooth transitioning from the old to the new strategic era	94	2.00	5.00	4.01	0.97
There are mechanisms to manage change brought about by new strategy	94	1.00	5.00	3.66	0.95
Incentives in commitment for strategy implementation team	94	1.00	5.00	3.59	1.12