

Analysis of Implementation of Strategic Plans in Institutions of Higher Learning in Kenya: A Case of Moi University

*Kiptum Jeniffer J., Chumba Sammy K., Wambua Benjamin K.
Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya*

Abstract

In recent years, strategic planning has gained fame in all sectors of the economy. Kenya's successive development plans since independence in 1963 to date emphasizes the centrality of regular participation in development activities. The purpose of this study was to analyze the implementation of strategic plans in Higher Learning Institutions in Kenya. The study was guided by the following research objectives: to establish how institutional factors influence implementation of strategic plans and to establish the effect of quality management systems in implementation of strategic planning. The study was modeled on the generalized classical theory of growth and stagnation. The study targeted a population of 14 Deans, 78 Heads of Department (HODs) in academics and 31 Heads of department in administration. Purposively all the deans were included in the study. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample the HODs. The sample size constituted 14 deans and 23 HODs. Data was collected using self-administered structured questionnaires and interview schedules. Validity of the instruments was rated by the research experts whereas a pilot study and mock interviews were undertaken to determine the reliability of the instruments. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings from the study showed that institutional factors in the university are not satisfactory and Quality Management Systems (QMS) were not fully efficient to facilitate effective strategic plan implementation. In regard to these findings the study recommends that the university to adequately build the capacity of all staff and provide feedback on quality management systems in order to implement its strategic plan effectively. These findings are of significant importance to the management of institutions of higher learning in that it has revealed gaps that ought to be filled to attain effective and efficient implementation of its strategic plan.

Key words: *Strategic plans, institutional factors, Quality Management Systems*

Introduction

In the 21st century, management of learning institutions in Kenya as demonstrated elsewhere in the world is and continues to be a challenge to the managers. The challenges are posed by; the changing nature of the society, development in technology, social and economic changes, political and cultural developments and globalization. In searching for the means to achieve improvement, governments and educators have looked to the quality techniques developed in business and industry to provide suitable tools. The need for academic institutions to turn also to strategic management so as to more positively address their own futures has been a popular topic for some time with a number of approaches being suggested as framework for its introduction

According to the Government of Kenya (2008), Vision 2030 is the government's long-term development strategy that forms a base for strategic plans. It is the document that guides all government agencies and institutions. The vision aims at delivering its mission based on defined goals and projects. It is a long term process that requires dedication and focuses beyond the initial five year period. Kenyan universities have always followed on the government's five year planning cycle in the development of its strategic plans. It was until the advent of performance contracting that it demanded that planning be based on strategic levels (Lewa, Mutuku & Mutuku, 2009). Mwiria et al (2007) noted that in the past all public universities have instituted reforms in response to the changing environment. Some did so without benefit of a planning unit or section to plan and co-ordinate these activities.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic plans in public universities do exist with the aim of actualizing an institutions vision, mission and set objectives. These institutions of higher learning are still faced with problems of accommodation and other physical infrastructure, expansion, student enrolment, implementation of decisions, governance, financial management, quality, academic issues despite the existence of strategic plans (Moi University, 2009). These challenges emerge from the dynamic economy and technologies of the 21st century as well as the rising demand for education. This has curtailed the functionality of a university in trying to achieve its set objectives through implementation of a strategic plan.

Several scholars have tried to unveil the reasons behind the complications encountered in the implementation of strategic plans in institutions and organizations. Mwangi (2012), Miano (2011), Muiruri (1996), Messah (2011), Reichert (2009) and Crebert & Daniel (1998) highlighted in their studies that the process of implementing strategic plans is hampered by poor management and leadership skills, inadequate resources, institutional culture, policies on education, and inadequate stakeholder participation.

Though learning institutions struggle to implement these plans, their efforts tend to pull and diffuse apart since less has been done to uncover the problems they face during implementation. Therefore there is need to undertake an analysis in implementation of strategic plans in institutions of higher learning in Kenya since less has been highlighted by previous researchers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the implementation of strategic plans in Higher Learning Institutions in Kenya with a focus on Moi University.

Specific Objectives

- a) To establish how institutional factors influence implementation of strategic planning in Moi University.
- b) To establish the effectiveness of quality management systems used on implementation of strategic planning in Moi University.

Literature Review

Concept of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning emanates from the words strategy and plan. A strategy can be defined as an overall approach, based on ones understanding of context, ones function in his strengths and weakness in their attempt to address a problem. Strategy has military origins as argued by McCarthy, Minichiello & Curran (2002). It is derived from a Greek word “strategos”, meaning a general.

Muiruri (1996) defines it as a process of developing a mission and long-range objectives and determining in advance how they will be accomplished. He further asserts that it entails developing a mission statement and long-term objectives for a certain period such as five years and reviewed and revised every year. He views it as the work of top level managers.

Shapiro (2001) in the tool kit to strategic planning views strategic planning as an overall planning that facilitates the good management process. She sees it as a plan that takes you out of the organizations day activities, and provides you with the big picture of what you are doing and where you are going. It gives clarity about what an organization would want to achieve and strategies for achieving their set objectives.

Strategic planning can therefore be described as a tool by which management in an organization determines the long-term direction and performance of the organization by ensuring that careful formulation, effective implementation and continuous evaluation of the strategy takes place.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education in Kenya

Messah (2011) in a study entitled “factors affecting the implementation of strategic plans in government Tertiary institutions” found out that weak influence of managerial behavior, weak institutional policies, low stakeholder awareness and influence of rewards and incentives were some of the factors that hinder effective and efficient strategic plan implementation.

In a study undertaken by Muiruri (1996), “a survey of planning practices in universities” identified four challenges that strategic plans in universities face. The study highlighted that planning focuses on shifting resources from areas of low productivity to areas of high productivity. In this regard however there are inbuilt inflexibilities within universities which make such resources transfers difficult, such as asking a professor in the school of business to move to the school of education to elevate shortage of staff. The study pointed out that strategic planning in higher education is a necessity in that it communicates to members of the institution the objectives, goals and strategies to be adopted to attain the institution’s mission.

A study undertaken by Miano (2011) established that several aspects hinder adoption and implementation of strategic plans. The study noted that leadership, institutional resources

and policy challenges are some of the factors hindering this process. On the other hand, institutional challenges such as culture, history, location, management, staffing and environment play a role in the success of strategic planning implementation. The author further noted that institutional managers who are visionless are not in a position to provoke heads of departments to engage in strategic planning.

The aforementioned studies indicate that there are challenges in implementation of strategic plans in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. This study aimed at establishing how better strategic plan implementation can be achieved in institutions of higher learning as it will help to bridge the gap that already exists by contributing to the knowledge and practice of strategic planning in the network of educational institutions.

Methodology

The study adopted case study design. The study was concerned with an analysis of implementation of strategic plans in Moi University. Oso and Onen (2005) argue that Case study research design generally encompass the use of a small selected sample. The study employed stratified random sampling technique in which the researchers sub-divided the population of 78 departments and 31 sections into strata as per their schools and management sections. Purposively all the 14 deans were included in the study. A sample size of 46 respondents was drawn from the study.

The study employed the use of self administered questionnaires. Structured interviews were used to encompass a set of predetermined open ended questions. Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003) argue that interviews provide data which is real, deep, readily honest and rich (fully of higher responses). Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) recognize that documents give background information about the topic and provide information that will form part of the conceptual framework.

Quantitative data was presented by use of descriptive statistics using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Qualitative data was organized by generating themes. These categories were analyzed in relation to the research objectives and presented in narrative form.

Findings and Discussion

Institutional Factors Influencing Implementation of Strategic Planning In regard to how satisfactory were institutional factors on implementation of strategic plans, the results are demonstrated in table 1.

Table 1: How Satisfactory are Institutional Factors on Implementation of Strategic Planning

Institutional factors		VS	S	NO	US	VUS	Mean	Std. Deviation
Encouraging team work	f	2	16	1	11	0	2.7	1.055
	%	6.7	53.3	3.3	36.7	0		
Promoting loyalty	f	4	11	3	12	0	2.77	1.135
	%	13.3	36.7	10	40	0		
Enhancing punctuality	f	3	11	0	16	0	2.97	1.159
	%	10	36.7	0	53.3	0		
Commitment to the university's vision and mission	f	3	12	4	8	3	2.87	1.224
	%	10	40	13.3	26.7	10		
Staff interpersonal relationship	f	3	13	4	10	0	2.7	1.055
	%	10	43.3	13.3	33.3	0		
Staff motivation by the university	f	3	7	0	13	7	3.07	1.437
	%	10	23.3	0	43.3	23.3		
University culture	f	2	10	4	10	4	3.13	1.224
	%	6.7	33.3	13.3	33.3	13.3		
Staff involvement in implementation	f	2	8	1	13	6	3.43	1.278
	%	6.7	26.7	3.3	43.3	20		

VS = very satisfactory, S = satisfactory, NO=No Opinion, US = unsatisfactory, VUS = very unsatisfactory,

As evident in table1, 53.3% (16) of the respondents asserted that encouraging team work in the university is satisfactory. Nonetheless, 40% (12) of the respondents found promoting loyalty to be unsatisfactory in implementation of strategic planning and 53.3% (16) of the respondents were of the opinion that enhancing punctuality has been unsatisfactorily done in the implementation of strategic planning. Further, 40% (12) of the respondents found commitment to university's vision and mission to be satisfactory. Also 43.3% (13) of the respondents noted that staff interpersonal relationship is satisfactory in the implementation of strategic factors.

Similarly, 43.3% (13) of the respondents found staff motivation by the university to be unsatisfactory whereas 33.3% (10) of the respondents reported that the university culture is satisfactory in implementation of strategic planning. Likewise, 43.3% (13) of the respondents found staff involvement in implementation unsatisfactory. Shapiro (2001) agrees with these findings when she suggested that it is important to involve the whole organization in the planning process.

In regard to institutional factors and implementation of strategic plan, deans interviewed reported that punctuality is unsatisfactory since other members from the academic staff have lessons outside the university. Respondents were of the view that technical staff is a problem but the support staff is satisfactory in terms of punctuality.

With reference to teamwork, to some respondents it is average to others it is satisfactorily good. They had no opinion towards loyalty, but were of the view that they do perceive implementation positively.

Effectiveness of QMS used on Implementation of Strategic Planning

It was deemed important by the researchers to establish the effectiveness of Quality Management System so as to have the required insight of its impact on strategic planning. The findings on the effectiveness of QMS are illustrated in table 2:

Table 2: Effectiveness of QMS

		VE	E	UD	I	VI	Mean	Std. Deviation
Performance contracts	F	3	10	7	9	1	2.83	1.085
	%	10	33.3	23.3	30	3.3		
Performance appraisals	F	2	11	6	10	1	2.9	1.062
	%	6.7	36.7	20	33.3	3.3		
Curricula review	F	7	16	7	2	0	2.2	0.805
	%	16.7	53.3	23.3	6.7	0		
Internal audit	F	4	19	4	3	0	2.2	0.805
	%	13.3	63.3	13.3	10	0		
External audit	F	2	21	4	3	0	2.27	0.74
	%	6.7	70	13.3	10	0		
Monitoring and evaluation of strategic planning process	F	1	11	6	10	2	3.03	1.066
	%	3.3	36.7	20	33.3	6.7		
Review strategic plan implementation	F	2	14	4	8	2	2.8	1.126
	%	6.7	46.7	13.3	26.7	6.7		

VE= very effective, E= effective, UD= undecided, I= ineffective VI= very ineffective,

In regard to effectiveness of quality management system, table 2 reveals that 33.3% (10) of the respondents confirmed that performance contracts are effective. Likewise, 36.7% (11) of the respondents found performance appraisals to be effective and 53.3% (16) of the respondents reported that the curricula review is effective. Further, 63.3% (19) of the respondents confirmed that the internal audit is effective and 70 % (21) the respondents alluded that the external audit is effective. Similarly, 36.7% (11) of the respondents reported that the monitoring and evaluation of strategic planning process is effective. Finally, 46.7% (14) of the respondents noted that the review of strategic plan implementation is effective. In relation to the metrics in place to track progress, the deans reported that there are reviews done using the following mechanisms: performance /staff appraisals, performance contracts, internal and external audits, regular reports, course evaluations, alumni’s, rating of universities, matrix on time frames, curricula review, summary of spending, number of graduates, progression of students, recruitment in terms of staff and ISO procedures both locally and internationally.

Pertaining to the effectiveness of these metrics in regard to implementation of strategic planning, majority of the deans interviewed were of the view that they were not effective. They attributed this to institutional mistrust, lack of penalties, lack of feedback and ignorance. These views agree with Lewa, Mutuku & Mutuku (2009) as they highlighted in a joint study that institutions of higher learning are faced by performance challenges. They attributed this to concerns of students which according to them are highly uneven. On the other hand Reichert (2009) found out that quality standards and assurance in institutions were undermined by instruments such as universal use of external examiners, professional and statutory bodies and expert standards on curricula. Similarly Messah (2011) found out that absence of a systematic form of faculty members performing metrics was one of the factors hindering implementation of strategic plans.

Conclusions

Institutional culture and traditions in institutions greatly influence implementation. Culture influences the behavior of employees towards achievement of university's goals and objectives. Though aspects such as teamwork, loyalty, commitment, staff interpersonal relationships, and motivation have positively promoted implementation, it has not done so fully. This is so in that staff are poorly rewarded and motivated. Similarly the university has not fully used the plan to make decisions about the future of the university.

Similarly, the quality management systems and instruments put in place in the university are efficient, though feedbacks from these evaluation metrics are not provided by the university. These procedures too have created some form of mistrust and suspicion between staff. Thus the attitude towards embracing the system of strategic plan implementation is faced with challenges.

Recommendations

Institutional factors were found to be instrumental in enhancing the implementation of strategic planning. Thus the university should explore ways in which it can use to motivate its staff. Such may include giving rewards or recognizing schools or departments that achieve objectives according to the plan. This will boost staff morale and enhance punctuality, loyalty, commitment and perception towards implementation.

Institutions of Higher Learning should consider introduction of midterm and short term reviews of its strategic plan. This will ensure that amendments can be made in line with technological or economical changes as well as views by staff that may arise. Likewise the university ought to institute penalties and feedback mechanisms in relation to quality management systems. This will ensure that the strategic plan is operational, current and does not gather dust in shelves.

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