

STRATEGIC HRM'S ROLE IN STRATEGIC PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION BY  
THE HIGH EDUCATION TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA

Mary Ragui

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture  
and Technology (JKUAT)

David Gichuhi

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture  
and Technology (JKUAT)

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ABSTRACT

In the turbulent environment facing organizations, strategic human resource management (SHRM) is looked upon as the savior to the strategy implementation. Human resource or human capital is recognized as a major factor for organization's success (Armstrong, 2008). An organization with all the other resources minus effective human resource can accomplish very little of its objectives if any. From O'Regan & Ghobadian (2004), strategic planning is necessary for organizational purpose, realistic goals and objectives, consistency with the organization's mission, communication, priorities, productivity corrective action, consensus, efficiency, effectiveness and teamwork. These reasons create urgency for implementation of the strategic plans for an organization's success. For strategic planning implementation to be achieved, there is need for a 'fit' between the SHRM and the organization's strategy calling for tighter SHRM strategies. This paper is work-in-progress research with main objective being identification of the factors hindering strategy implementation in the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Kenya and corrective action that can be taken to address them. The study will adopt an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design, which will ensure ease in understanding the insight and ideas about the problem. The main instruments for data collection will be a semi-structured questionnaire and face-to-face standardized interview. Multiple regression analysis will be carried out to establish relationships of the independent variables to the dependent and enable modeling of the factors hindering strategic planning implementation in the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Kenya.

**Key Words:** *strategic human resource management, strategy planning implementation, higher education training institutions in Kenya*

## **Introduction**

Strategic planning implementation is an uphill task for many organizations (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 2002). Many well conceived plans which cost organizations a fortune are never implemented and lie in the library accumulating dust. This is as a result of poor implementations strategies based on resources and capabilities of the firms (Wheelen and Hunger, 2010). The higher education institutes (HEIs) in Kenya have not been left behind among the many as implementation of the strategic plans remains a challenge (Nganga, 2009; Omutoko, 2009; Manyasi, 2009; Lankeu and Maket, 2012; and Kiamba, 2008). The strategic plans designed at the high level remain unimplemented and the tasks on the work plans always have the timeline as 'ongoing' (Manyasi, 2009). It is therefore important to investigate what the problem is by unearthing the factors hindering strategic planning implementation in the HEIs in Kenya. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) will be among the many factors investigated as human resources strategies if well integrated with the business strategy results to high performance of an organization following implementation of strategic plans (Wheelen and Hunger, 2010).

## **Strategic planning**

Strategic planning is an official managerial process involving a sequence of analytical and evaluative procedures that formulate an intended strategy and the means or process of implementing it while staying competitive (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2005). It is concerned with developing a corporation's mission, objectives, strategies, and policies which forms the basis of communicating to others in order to inform, motivate and involve them (Wheelen and Hunger, 2010). It ensures effective use of resources by focusing resources on the key priorities, serves as a framework for decisions or for securing support, enables monitoring of results and be accountable to, assists in benchmarking, performance monitoring and evaluation, and stimulates change and become building block for next plan (Wheelen and Hunger, 2010). The best conceived strategies are of little value if they are not implemented effectively (Gomez-Mejia and Balkin, 2002).

There are many barriers to strategic planning execution including too many and conflicting priorities; the top team not function well; top down management style; inter-functional conflicts; poor vertical communication; and inadequate management development ( Alexander, 1991). Most of these barriers can be resolved using the SHRM where fit strategies of human resources are integrated with business strategies to enable the organization to achieve its objectives (Armstrong, 2008). SHRM will assist implementation of the strategic plans through devolved structures, reduced bureaucracy, empowerment of staff, proper HR planning, management development, creating high performance workplaces, and lifelong learning and instilling of values and strategies for service delivery in a planned and systematic way (Lankeu and Maket, 2012).

## **Strategic human resource management**

Armstrong (2008) defined SHRM as an approach defining how the organization's goals would be achieved through people by means of HR strategies and integrated HR policies and practices. HR practices leads to choice of strategic plans for development of overall HR strategies and implementation of strategy while changing employees' behavior (Armstrong, 2008). Human

resource management (HRM) is as a strategic approach to leveraging people's capabilities for an organization to achieve competitive advantage (Bratton and Gold, 2003). HRM 'bundles' to enable leverage of these capabilities include policies, practices and programmes (Purcell, 1999). The bundles are however only achievable through formulated HRM strategies that can be integrated to the organization's strategies. Inclinations to better recruitment and selection procedures and better reward system which culminate from the bundles propounds the viability of HRM which lead to quantifiable improvements in organizational performance (Beardwell, Holden and Claydon, 2004).

Caldwell(2004) pointed out twelve policy goals of HRM which includes: managing people as assets; aligning HRM policies with business policies and corporate strategy; developing a close fit between them; encouraging teamworking; creating a flatter and more flexible organization for quick response to change; building greater employee commitment to the organization; empowering employees to manage their own self-development and learning; creating a strong customer-first philosophy throughout the organization; developing reward strategies designed to support a performance-driven culture; improving employee involvement through better internal communication; increasing line management responsibility for HR policies; and developing the facilitating role of managers as enablers. In summary, HRM is an approach consisting of four functions namely: staffing, training, development and motivation, and four activities; getting people, preparing them, stimulating them, and keeping them.

Michigan school of thought highlight strategic tools to HRM as: succession planning, human resources planning, performance management, competency building, training and re-training for skill development, people centered organizational development interventions, value creation through HR, leveraging human potential, reward management, and managing change (Kar, 2012). Some strategic HRM issues are skill availability and development; motivation issues, compensation design and structure, employee grading, remuneration system, performance management system, career development framework and competency frameworks for assessment and evaluation (Kar, 2012).

### **Strategic planning implementation**

Strategic planning implementation can be possible with if the policy makers design HRM using emerging ideas like innovative and creative behavior, total contribution to the firm, cross functional integration, high concern for customer value, managing diversity, and using labor as critical investment (Bagshaw, 2004). Change of cultural values will enhance strategic planning implementation if well guided by leadership as change agents (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). However, as it might be impossible for leadership to reach all employees, delegation of organizational accountability is necessary (Connors and Smith, 2011). Strategic HRM is important to ensure delegation of this leadership for change is done in the right way for strategy implementation's success. Motivation of individual employees for internalization of the desired value is also important to reduce resistance of change (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). Maurer (2010) suggested that leadership should provide means for overcoming the resistance through devised strategy promising winning for all via the change.

### **Strategy implementation by EHIs and SHRM**

Following findings from some scholars, SHRM particularly HR practices is instrumental in strategy implementations by EHIs. Shahzad et al. (2008) in Pakistan found that rewards practices motivated university teachers in university making the strategy implementation smooth and effective. Randy et al. (2002) in China and Hong Kong also found compensation to send message to management that when strengthened the business strategies of the organization would be achieved faster enhancing performance. From Iran, Roya et al. (2011) also revealed that compensation practices led to fulfilment of psychological contract making teachers more committed to their work. In Spain, Roberto and Arocas (2007) found that salary strategies and job enrichment strategies had an impact on performance of teachers and ultimately business strategy implementation. Lobburi (2012) however in addition to salary strategies in Thailand also unveiled fairness and growth opportunity strategies as key to motivation of staff.

Other HR practices were found to motivate staff and increase strategy implementation level. Benson (2006) in the USA found training and development strategy related to organizational commitment and negatively related to turnover of employees at University of Texas. Still in the USA, Ryan and Todd (2006) concluded that comprehensive performance appraisal strategy enhanced control and better performance of the University. Abdullah et al. (2011) found performance appraisal strategy's perception to either negatively or positively affect staff performance in the National University of Malaysia. Career development strategy was also found critical in a university in Taiwan (Tser et al., 2004); university in Israel (Anna, 2008); and university in Malaysia (Helmi, 2006). Employee relations strategies between employees and their supervisors was also found helpful in strategy implementation in university of Oklahoma (Rebecca, 2012); Nagoya university (Foong, 2008); and Norwegian school of management (Kuvaas, 2006).

According to Lynch (2000), the human resource in an organization sometimes resists change proposals making strategy implementation difficult. This can be manifested through many ways including but not limited to procrastination and delays in triggering the process of change, unforeseen implementation delays and inefficiencies which make it cost more than was originally anticipated, lack of commitment, absenteeism, disrespect of deadlines, and poor performance. These problems can only be solved via SHRM where HR strategies are linked to business strategies for easier strategy implementation.

In a study carried out in public universities and collaborating colleges in Kenya on competency, experience and industrial exposure of faculty members, Nganga (2009) found out that a systematic form of faculty member's performance metrics was missing. Because of the missing method of measuring, assessing and monitoring the faculty member's performance and effectiveness, the universities were unable to attain their goals and objective. Lack of motivation because of low salaries coupled with poor communication was also found to hinder implementations of strategy implementation. The findings are in line with those of Beer and Eisenstat (2006) that vertical communication is an obstacle to successful strategic implementation.

In a study on challenge of crisis management in institutions of higher learning in Kenya Manyasi (2009) found that managers in the institution do not use a proactive approach to crises management as many did not have a crisis management plan. Strategy implementation calls for

ability to manage crisis and think beyond management actions that can assist in faster implementation of strategy. These could be through training of organizational members, integrating crises management into statements of corporate excellence, creating crises management teams and including outsiders on the board.

Kiamba (2008) studied experience of privately sponsored studentship and other income generating activities at the University of Nairobi. The findings were that although public universities are getting millions of shillings every year from parallel students, no ambitious staff development programs have been developed to assist lectures. This has resulted to many lecturers stagnation at the Master's degree level. This is common in East Africa where public universities have embraced the concept of entrepreneurial university, a model that identifies higher education resources and their exploitation. Implementation of strategy is however hindered by the continual evaluation and control that could be because of lack of motivation and incentive structure.

Alashloo, Castka & Sharp (2005) in a study on strategy implementation in Iranian higher education institutes found that strategic drift will be inevitable if employees have inadequate experience and knowledge, their feelings of insecurity and fear of failure will increase. Other findings of the study were: lack of motivation which can be attributed to low income, high levels of responsibility, extensive bureaucracy, and cumbersome administrative processes; poor teamwork structure and a spirit of individualism which decreases employees desire to work in team. All these result to failure of strategic implementation.

Omutoko (2009) studied re-thinking the management of higher education institutions transformational leadership and found that higher education is in crisis today which is aggravated by low quality as a result of rapid enrolment, growth under limited resources, inefficiency in terms of inappropriate use of public resources, high dropout rates, program duplication and inequity. The study recommended management training for lecturers and managers, orientation and induction of new staff and mentorship on management. There is need for universities to achieve their mission and vision which is only possible through implementation of strategy. Knowledge management practices that include making use of the corporate portal concept and management by results is key to strategy implementation.

Kohtamaki and Salmela-Mattila (2009) in their study on balancing organizational differentiation and integration shows that the preparation and implementation process of the strategy is crucial. The study also ponders on how actors from students to senior management are involved in the strategy process. The strategic planning process is deemed more important than the formal strategy document. The study concluded that wide participation of the personnel in the strategy planning processes and decision-making process should be encouraged by the institutional leaders to enable interactive processes that enhance commitment in the implementation.

### **HRM models**

The HRM models investigated for use in this study are the Harvard Model (1984) and Storey's HRM Model (1989). These theories are appropriate as they reveal the strategic human resources management that can increase implementation of strategic planning either directly or indirectly. The importance of human capital is also outlined on the models making their attention necessary.

### The Harvard Model

Beer et al. (1984) postulated the model at the Harvard University and coined up the HRM territory. Though deeply rooted on the tradition human relations, the model which acknowledges the existence of multiple stakeholders, including employees, government and the community at large, it recognizes organization's human resources (employees) that give competitive advantage through treating them as assets and not costs. The main factors highlighted by the model are: (1) HR strategy which include employee influence, HR flows, reward system, work system. (2) HR outcomes including commitment, congruence, competence and cost. (3) Long-term consequences that refers to the organizational effectiveness, individual well being and societal well being. (4) Situational interests including workforce type, business strategy, management philosophy, labour market and task technology. Armstrong (2008) summarised the activities performed by organization as indicated by this model as selection, appraisal, rewards and development. Boxall, Purcell and Wright (2007) however pointed out the weakness of this model arguing that HRM is not what just the departments do.

This study will concentrate on the HR strategy factor and the HR outcome factor of the model to review the role of strategic HRM in strategy implementation. Beardwell et al. (2004) insist that high employee commitment led to better job performance which could enable strategy implementation in an organization. Although the other factors of the model are also significant, they will not be incorporated in this study as its aim to dig into the problem and ensure ease in understanding the insight and ideas on the same.

### Storey's HRM Model

Storey's model of 1989 concentrated more on holistic approach of HRM with a set of interrelated policies, an ideological and philosophical underpinning. This model was based on four aspects (1) Beliefs and assumptions where human resources were recognizes as the main factor of production giving a difference as a result of their capabilities and commitments and therefore needs to nurtured as valuable assets. (2) Strategic qualities where HR calls for attention of top executives in the organization as their performance is a source of competitive advantage. It therefore requires policies which are sensitive to the demands of the competitive business environment, business strategy and the HR strategy. (3) Role of line managers who are important owing to their strong link between them and their respective subordinates or employees. (4) Key levers where culture management is argued to be important than managing of systems and procedures since it aligns organizational values, beliefs and assumptions to the employees commitment, responsibility and empowerment.

This study will concentrate on all the four aspects of the model: beliefs and assumptions, strategic qualities, role of line managers, and the key levers. Schein (2010) concluded that culture includes shared assumptions, cultural values, shared behaviors and cultural symbols. These are as illustrated by the first and second aspect of this model. As Hultman (2001) concluded it is not possible to change organizational culture without changing the employees, strategy implementation is therefore not possible without implementation of the changes. This study will be guided by this model to unearth the role of strategic HRM in the strategy implementation as they all sum up to the soft and hard connotations of HRM.

## Conclusions

Kenya, like other developing country, requires implementation of strategies in the HEIs to sustain investments and growth. The extent to which the implementation can be realized is dependent on the degree and extent of efficiency with which the critical factor of SHRM dealt with. This study will provide useful insights on SHRM and its effect on implementation of strategic planning. The results of the study will enable the education sector to go a long way in fulfilling its mandate of contribution to growth towards the achievement of the Vision 2030 objective of reducing poverty through knowledge and information sharing and thus boost the modern growth trend. The study results and literature review will also form an important base for information for stakeholders in the education sector, researchers, scholars and members of the public interested in the area of study by laying out clearly the key factors of SHRM that influence the strategic planning implementation in Kenya's HEIs and hence allowing the stakeholders to focus on them when playing their roles in the sector.

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