

EFFECTS OF BUREACRATIC STRUCTURES ON STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION IN THE KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Organizations worldwide have come to appreciate the importance of strategy in dealing with emerging global competition and changing business environment. The public sector in Kenya has been required to develop strategic plan as directed by the Performance Contracting guidelines (2010-2011), Kenya Vision 2030 and sector development plan. This study endeavored to investigate how the bureaucratic organizational structure affects strategic plan implementation in the public sector in Kenya, and recommend ways in which this structure can be improved in order for it to support the process of strategic plan implementation in an effective and efficient manner. The case study facilitated an in depth study on how the bureaucratic structure affects strategic plan implementation. Further, the research was based on qualitative method whereby both structured and non structured questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents. This study targeted all the employees who are involved directly or indirectly in the implementation of the organization's strategic plan the public universities in Kenya. The study found out that the bureaucratic structure in the Kenyan public universities affects the process of decision making in implementation of the strategic plan which greatly derailed the implementation of strategic plan in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Other effects include the process of resources allocation and thus completion of tasks in strategic plan implementation in the Kenyan public universities. Communication flow also affects the process of strategic plan implementation especially where vital information is delayed, or is not availed at all. The bureaucratic structure affects the level of employee commitment to organizational goals. This is reflected through detachment and aloofness that emanates from the structure which in turn affects the process of strategic plan implementation.

Key Words: *Bureaucracy, Strategic plan, Strategic plan implementation, organizational structure*

Introduction

Organizations worldwide have come to appreciate the importance of strategy in dealing with emerging global competition and changing business environment. The public sector in Kenya has been required to develop strategic plan as directed by the Performance Contracting guidelines (2010-2011), Kenya Vision 2030 and sector development plan. This requirement was

also initiated by the public sector reforms in Kenya which began in 1963. The reforms were aimed at addressing three challenges facing the government at the moment; disease, poverty and illiteracy. The public Universities in Kenya, being part of the public sector have not been left out in this.

Yabs (2010) defines strategy implementation as the phase in strategic planning where actions are taken to actualize approved plans. Grant (2004) defines an organizational structure as the total of ways in which its labour is divided into distinct tasks and then its coordination and integration is achieved among those tasks. Organizational structure provides a backbone upon which all of a company's operational policies and work processes are built.

The public sector organizations in Kenya, thus including Kenyan public universities use the bureaucratic organizational structure characterized by tall chains of command, strict rules, procedures and regulations that are followed to the letter/red tapes. According to Strikwerda (2012) in the twentieth century organization design, at the governance level used to be merely a choice between a limited number of alternative organizational forms. Due to global development changes however, there is need to to reconsider organization's design. According to Chandler (1962), in Halls and Siais (1980), unless structure follows strategy, inefficiency results.

According to Wehrich, Koontz and Cannice (2010) an organization is a formalized structure of roles and positions. This organization should not necessarily be inflexible but to a certain extent, it should provide for an optimal performance of individuals in achievement of organizational goals by allowing some flexibility, room for decision making, optimal utilization and recognition of talents and capabilities. In designing an organizational structure, Saleemi (2006) emphasizes on the need to include flexibility and efficiency as some of the major considerations.

According to Saleemi (2006) bureaucracy refers to a situation where the organizational structures, rules and procedures are stringently followed without any digression. The system is characterized by complex administrative systems, high specialization levels, inflexible authority levels and detailed rules and regulations which are also strictly enforced, impersonality is dominant whereby the management exhibits an impersonal aloofness and detachment from the subordinates. According to Jones and George (2003) in Weber (1922) bureaucracy was intended to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, in an effort to help Germany manage its growing industrial enterprises at the time when it was undergoing an industrial revolution.

Saleemi (2006) argues that the main advantage of a bureaucratic system is that it is stable and enables amalgamated focusing of organizational resources and efforts in achievement of its objectives. Managers may allow the rules and standard operating procedures (bureaucratic red tape) to become so complicated that decision making becomes slow and inefficient and organizations become unable to change (Jones and George, 2003). Thus, bureaucratic systems pose a challenge to managers, who may therefore use them to harm rather than to benefit the organization.

Decision making could be slower in organizations with many levels. According to Koteen (1997) managers at the highest levels, who are responsible for making organization-wide decisions, are often not equipped with complete or timely information to do so, as it takes a substantial amount of time for information to reach them. Gareth, (2011) argues that slow decision making increases

organizational costs, impedes performance and may result in organizational failure. Decision-making is usually slower in hierarchical structures because responsibility and authority are concentrated in a few people at the top.

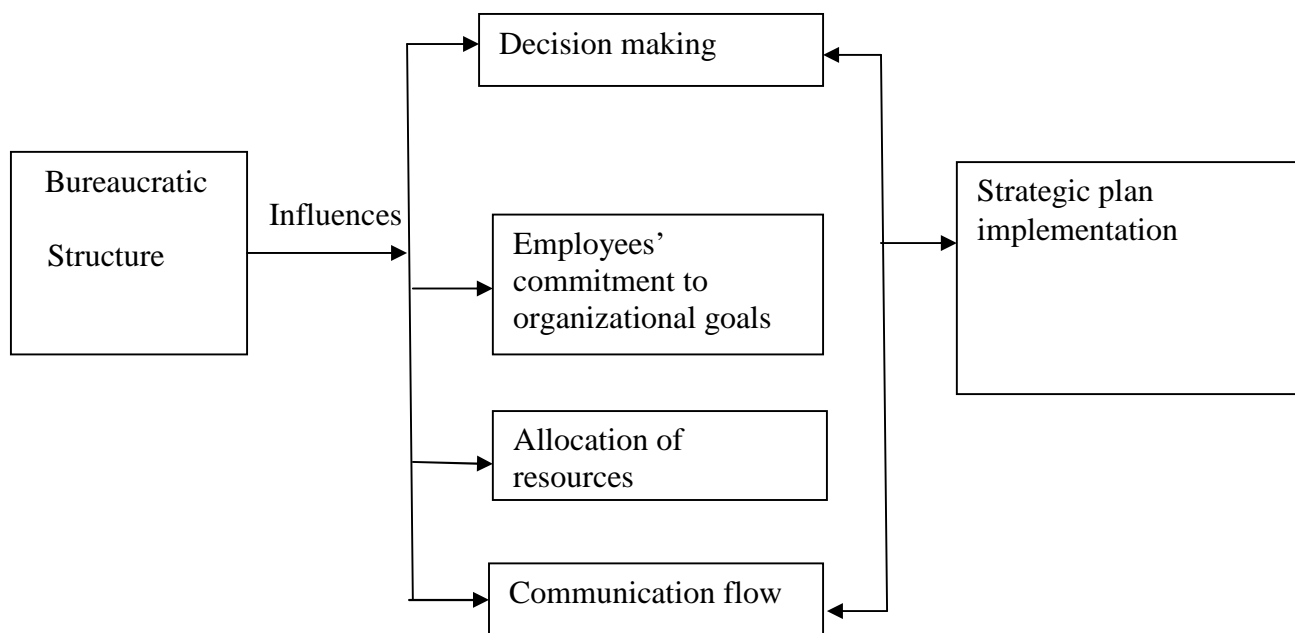
According to Baron (2000) organization needs communication to make more efficient their tasks. Organizations with many levels are often plagued with communication problems, because messages must pass through many individuals and layers before reaching their intended destinations (Gareth, 2011). This increases the risk of distortion and slows the speed of communication. Decisions made at the upper level take time to move down to lower managers and employees, and it may be awhile before the results of a particular decision are communicated from the bottom to the top (Koteen, 1997). Abugre (2012) found out that regular communications between managers and employees have a direct positive effect on employee work output.

Omboi and Mucai (2011) looked at factors affecting strategic plan implementation in the government owned tertiary institutions in Kenya. They found out that resource allocation influences implementation of strategic plans through the preference of institutional leadership and the board of governors. Longenecker, Simonetti and Sharky (1999) while investigating the factors that cause organizations to fail, outlined that lack of critical resources is one of the major causes. This factor is further increased by political infighting/unhealthy competition, and that mostly, such infighting is caused by lack of critical resources or redirection of such resources to non priority areas.

According to Cole (1996) the weaknesses of bureaucratic structures however are slower decision-making, high levels of supervisor and managerial overheads, lack of employee freedom and lower employee morale. Pearce and Robinson (2011) recommend empowerment of employees whereby this entails allowing enough flexibility to make decisions and make initiatives. Locander and Luechauer (2006) stipulate that the structure of an organization has a profound influence on employee behaviour among other effects and that the structure should follow and enhance the strategy.

This study endeavored to investigate how the bureaucratic organizational structure affects strategic plan implementation in the public sector in Kenya, and recommend ways in which this structure can be improved in order for it to support the process of strategic plan implementation in an effective and efficient manner.

Conceptual Framework



Independent Variable

Mediating Variables

Dependent Variable

Relationship between dependent variable, intervening and independent variable

Research Methodology

The study adopted a case study to investigate how bureaucratic organizational structure may affect implementation of strategic plan. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. According to Kothari (2004) involves a careful and complete observation of a social unit. It is a method of study in depth rather than in breadth. The case study therefore facilitated an in depth study on how the bureaucratic structure affects strategic plan implementation. Further, the research was based on qualitative method whereby both structured and non structured questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents. This study targeted all the employees who are involved directly or indirectly in the implementation of the organization's strategic plan the public universities in Kenya.

Fifty (50) members of staff were purposively chosen for the study out of 350, which included 15 members of teaching staff and 35 members of non teaching staff that are directly involved with the implementation of the sampled Kenyan public universities strategic plans. According to Kasomo (2007), 10% of the total population is a representative sample for descriptive studies.

The researcher however administered questionnaires to more than 10% sample size in order to deal with the possibility of non response. The researcher used the non probabilistic sampling design of purposive sampling.

The data was summarized and categorized according to common themes. The data collected was analyzed using the SPSS program and presented using frequency distribution tables, graphs and pie charts. The SPSS computer software aided the analysis as it is user friendly and most appropriate for analysis of management related attitudinal responses.

Results and Discussions

Involvement in Decision Making

Altshuler (1997) points out that bureaucratic structure is characterized by routinization which demands compliance with a comprehensive set of rules and administrative regulations, which effectively limits decision making discretion among managers. The study showed that over 71% of the respondents rarely made any important decision that concerned their work on their own or they were not even sure of the same. Only 28% felt they were allowed to make important decisions regarding their work without consulting their immediate supervisors. This shows lack of independence in decision making which could obviously lead to delay in making urgent and crucial decisions.

Involvement in decision making process (Important decisions that affect work are often made without me being consulted)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	4	11.1	11.1	11.1
DISAGREE	4	11.1	11.1	22.2
NEUTRAL	8	22.2	22.2	44.4
AGREE	10	27.8	27.8	72.2
STRONGLY AGREE	10	27.8	27.8	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Abugre (2012) emphasizes the need for lower level employees to be involved in organizational activities and decision making, and that the latter is crucial to organizational performance.

The study findings reflected that only 19.5% felt they had enough say on the decisions made regarding their departments and workgroups. Mitzerberg (1979) emphasizes on the importance of organizations to replace the bureaucratic structure with structures that encourage workers to think outside the box and to capitalize on their entrepreneurial capabilities.

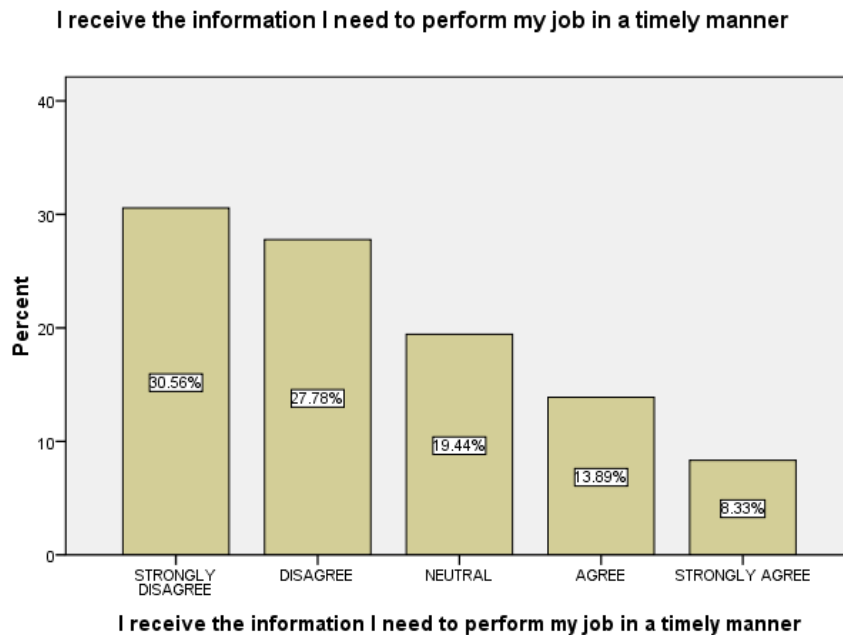
Communication Flow

Communication flow affects the implementation of the strategic plan through for instance, affecting decision making. Koteen (1997) argues that managers at higher levels, who are responsible for organization wide decision making, are often not equipped with complete and timely information to do so, and that it takes a considerable amount of time for information to reach them. The study showed that the following were the main sources of information for the staff involved in implementing the strategic plan in the Kenyan public universities:

Sources of information

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
My immediate supervisor	24	66.7%	12	33.3%	36	100.0%
Formal Meetings	18	50.0%	18	50.0%	36	100.0%
Memos and letters	30	83.3%	6	16.7%	36	100.0%
Employee reports	2	5.6%	34	94.4%	36	100.0%
Team briefings	2	5.6%	34	94.4%	36	100.0%
Trade union representative	11	30.6%	25	69.4%	36	100.0%
The grapevine	20	55.6%	16	44.4%	36	100.0%
Face to face	5	13.9%	31	86.1%	36	100.0%
Electronic communications (telephones, emails, skype)	22	61.1%	14	38.9%	36	100.0%

Communication was mostly formal with the main sources being immediate supervisor's instructions, formal meetings, memos and letters and electronic communication. Where information was not provided formally, grapevine took centre stage as reflected in the table above. Grapevine emerges mostly in the organization due to inadequacy or complete lack of information caused by either important information being held at the top or having the wrong channels of communication which may for instance delay information from reaching the implementers of for instance, the strategic plan. Baron (2000) highlights the importance of communication in order for an organization to achieve goals, apart from socializing. Grapevine may also cause communication distortion and this poses a challenge to effectiveness and efficiency of strategic plan implementation.



Timeliness of Information

According to Gareth (2011), organizations with many levels are often plagued with communication problems, because messages must traverse through multiple individuals and layers before reaching their intended destinations. The research findings indicated that over 58% of staff involved with the strategic plan implementation did not receive the information needed for the same in a timely manner. Only 22% of the staff received the needed information in a timely manner. As observed by Saleemi (2006), it is important for an organization to adopt techniques into the organizational structure that permit quick and easy adaptation of the organization to changes in the operating environment. Untimely information is therefore an undesirable if an organization is to cope with the dynamic operating environment. Over 83% of the staff who participated in the study felt that if communication associated with their work changed, this could improve their performance.

Allocation of Resources and Effect on Task Completion

Timeliness of resource allocation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STRONGLY DISAGREE	19	52.8	52.8	52.8
DISAGREE	10	27.8	27.8	80.6
NEUTRAL	4	11.1	11.1	91.7
AGREE	2	5.6	5.6	97.2
STRONGLY AGREE	1	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Saleemi (2006) emphasizes that in order for an organization to efficiently accomplish predetermined objectives, it is important for the organization to free itself from complicated procedures and red tape. Over 76% of the staff that participated in the study expressed the feeling that the resources they require to accomplish their tasks were not being availed in a timely manner as reflected in the table above. This finding reflected that delays in availing of resources were caused by long chain of procedures (bureaucratic red tape) undertaken in the process of resource allocation in Kenyan public universities as was indicated by the findings

Sufficiency of resources allocated:

(The resources availed for my job are enough to the extent of allowing me to accomplish quality work)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	19	52.8	52.8	52.8
DISAGREE	8	22.2	22.2	75.0
NEUTRAL	4	11.1	11.1	86.1
AGREE	4	11.1	11.1	97.2
STRONGLY AGREE	1	2.8	2.8	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Longenecker, Simonetti and Shaky (1999) indicate that political infighting and unhealthy competition as is predominant in a bureaucracy causes critical resources to be redirected to non priority areas. Over 74% of the respondents also felt that the resources allocated were not sufficient to the extent of allowing them to accomplish quality work. 13% of the respondents however expressed satisfaction with the level of resources availed to them with 2% strongly agreeing that the resources were enough. Thus, the resources in the Kenyan public universities were either being directed towards meeting non strategic expenses at the expense of implementation of the strategic plan or were politicized so that only a few implementers got the resources they needed.

Over 88% of the respondents agreed that the process of resources allocation in the Kenya public universities goes through a long chain of approvals as reflected in the above bar graph. This long chain of approval (bureaucratic red tape) delays resource allocation in terms of the length of time taken before the same are availed and hence causing delay in task completion in line with implementation of the strategic plan.

Koteen (1997) argues that many levels in an organizational structure makes the organization inflexible and rigid and delays useful decisions. Thus the long chain of approval of resources delayed the process of strategic plan implementation.

Employee Commitment to Organizational Goals

The Allan and Meyer scale of employee commitment to organization was used to measure the fourth research objective – which was to examine how the bureaucratic structure influences employees' commitment to the organization's goals in line with the implementation of the strategic plan.

Commitment to organizational problems

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	10	27.8	28.6	28.6
	DISAGREE	9	25.0	25.7	54.3
	NEUTRAL	7	19.4	20.0	74.3
	AGREE	7	19.4	20.0	94.3
	STRONGLY AGREE	2	5.6	5.7	100.0
	Total	35	97.2	100.0	
Total		36	100.0		

The study found out that over 51% of the respondents did not feel as if their organization's problems were their own. 19% and only 25% felt that the problems were their own. The research findings indicated moderately high levels of lack of affective commitment of universities' strategic plan implementers to the organizational problems. Saleemi (2006) highlights that in a bureaucracy impersonality is dominant whereby the management exhibits an impersonal detachment and aloofness from the subordinates. The study findings reflected the above kind of detachment and aloofness emanating from the Kenyan public universities employees involved with the strategic plan implementation.

Only 17% felt that they were obligated to remain at the public universities, with over 57% of the respondents expressing feeling that they did not feel any obligation to remain. This indicates that only very few of the staff entrusted with the strategic plan implementation in Kenya public universities have personal attachment or personal sense of obligation to the organization. Locander and Luechauer (2006) express concern whether organizations operating in a dynamic environment can prosper if it is designed to treat employees like replaceable cogs in a big wheel as is in a bureaucracy whose structures are impersonal. Therefore employees need to be

empowerment and be allowed some autonomy in order to win their commitment to the organizational goals.

Conclusions

The bureaucratic structure in the Kenyan public universities affects the process of decision making in implementation of the strategic plan. The employees involved with its implementation are not involved in the process but decisions are just passed down to them for implementation. This affects the level of commitment of the employees to the goals covered in the strategic plan since they feel that they 'do not have a say' in the decisions, and hence they may not be very committed. This can greatly derail the implementation of strategic plan in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

The bureaucratic structure affects the process of resources allocation and thus completion of tasks in strategic plan implementation in the Kenyan public universities. The long chain of approval delays the availing of resources therefore delaying tasks completion. The resources availed are not enough to majority but a few get all the resources they need. This reflects that the level of resources allocated is not the same for every one across the board, highlighting presence of some individuals being preferred in resource allocation to others (politics). This can demotivate employees who do not get the same level of resources hence they may become non committal to the strategic plan goals. Therefore the bureaucratic structure affects strategic plan implementation process through allocation of resources.

Communication flow also affects the process of strategic plan implementation especially where vital information is delayed, or is not availed at all. Grape vine is also rampant in bureaucratic structure and use of this as a source of information may present great risk of information distortion. Grapevine surfaces in these structures mostly because most of the time vital information is withheld by the top management and the information becomes a source of power. Those that may be 'lucky' to get the information pass it to others through grapevine posing the risk of distortion. The strategic plan implementer may therefore fail to implement the plan due to untimely information, distortion of information or complete lack of information.

The bureaucratic structure affects the level of employee commitment to organizational goals. This is reflected through detachment and aloofness that emanates from the structure. The non commitment therefore affects the process of strategic plan implementation in that employees may not be willing to 'go an extra mile' in their work, hence results are mostly inefficient and ineffective implementation of strategic plan.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the Kenyan public universities employees should be involved more in the process of decision making, especially in those decisions that relate to their work. This will assist in making employees own the processes and therefore increase commitment to organizational goals. The top management should also encourage more flexible and relaxed methods of communication of the staff in the Kenyan public universities to reduce detachment and aloofness among employees and employees and their supervisors.

Information should be availed in a timely manner and employees should be encouraged to use emails and other faster electronic communication and reduce on formal means such as long meetings where employee have to wait for minutes for days, and letters and memos which have to follow long hierarchical approvals.

Resources allocation should be done on prioritization basis and on the basis of goals and objectives covered in the strategic plan. The organization should embrace and invest more in ICT to shorten processes of approvals within the Kenyan public universities structure, such as in resource allocation and communication flow.

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