

## **Influence of Leadership on Strategy Execution in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya: Case Study of Machakos Sub-County**

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### **Abstract**

*Benefits of effective strategy execution in government institutions cannot be disputed, even though there are several concerns about its success as well as the strategies to be adopted in implementation of strategic plans. The study sought to establish how leadership influenced strategy execution in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study applied a descriptive design and a target population of sixty-eight (68) principals in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-county was used. Simple random sampling was used to select fifty eight (58) participants. A questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument and a pilot study conducted with six (6) participants. The study established that there was a significant positive relationship between leadership and strategy execution in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study recommends that the government may closely monitor the leadership of secondary schools to ensure compliance with recommended leadership practices by the principals.*

**Keywords:** Strategy, Planning, Strategy execution, Leadership

**JEL Classification:** L22, L25

### **1. Introduction**

The strategy execution process converts the strategic objectives into results (Kumar, 2013). Strategy execution has been defined broadly from four perspectives: the process perspective that takes strategy execution as a sequence of carefully planned consecutive steps; the action perspective which takes strategy execution as a series of more or less concerted actions and examines these actions from a behavior perspective; the hybrid perspective which combines the process perspective and behavior or action perspective and; the gap perspective which focuses on gap variables, indicating inconsistency between strategy and execution (Kumar, 2013).

According to Bell, Dean, and Gottschalk (2010), strategy execution is commonly the most complicated and time-consuming part of strategic management, while strategy formulation is primarily an intellectual and creative act involving analysis and synthesis. Thus, it is important to study the properties of successful strategy implementation. According to Cater and Pucko (2010) the implementation of strategies was a key driver of the emergence of strategic management in late 20th century. The successful implementation of strong and robust strategies will give institutions such as public schools numerous advantages. These include high student pass rates, enhancement of teacher competence and reduction in student dropouts without overemphasizing well educated citizens which act as key custodians of innovation and inventions (Li, Guohui & Eppler, 2008). Well-crafted public school strategies only generate better performance for such schools when they are successfully implemented (Li, Guohui & Eppler, 2008). Whereas there is a lot of literature available regarding strategy, it is surprising to find not much that deals explicitly with execution.

Kenya recognizes that the education and training of all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of vision 2030. Education equips citizens with understanding and knowledge that enables them to make informed choices about their lives and those facing Kenyan society. The education sector, therefore, provides the skills that are required to steer Kenyans to economic and social goals for vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2008). A strategic approach to management in general has gained prominence in education in the recent past in Kenya (RoK, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Secondary schools in Kenya form the final cycle of the basic education after early childhood and primary education. The schools also form the transition period to higher education.

The Kenyan governments has established policies that require secondary schools to undertake thoughtful, comprehensive strategic planning and execution aimed at setting key strategies for sustainable improvement and determination of resource priorities (UNESCO, 2010). In Kenya, each public school under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is required to refocus its strategic direction in line with government policies under the TSC Act of 2012 (RoK, 2012).

## **2. Statement of the problem**

Whereas Strategic management has been applauded as a key management tool for successful organizations, a study by Bell, Dean, and Gottschalk (2010) cited that strategy execution is commonly the most complicated and time-consuming part of strategic management. Speculand (2009) observed that nine out of ten strategies fail to be successfully implemented. Prior researches have focused much on fit approach of aligning firms' resources or organization structure and strategic focus, operational training, control and feedback mechanism among others with strategy (Kumar, 2013). Previous empirical studies have given focus to demystifying the common myths associated with strategy execution (Sull & Homkes, 2015).

Research done by Icharia (2009) highlighted the Critical Success Factors (CSF) in KCSE examination in Kiambaa District whereas Mbaka & Mugambi (2013) focused on success factors in strategy implementation in the Kenyan water sector. Both studies reported a gap between strategy formulation and execution in the Kenyan public sector. Lewa, Mutuku and Mutuku (2009) reported that Kenyan Universities, colleges and secondary schools especially public ones, have always planned as a routine. Use of wrong strategies for execution, poor leadership skills, incompetent staff, poor resource allocation, inappropriate reward system and lack of monitoring and control are common issues cited for strategy execution problems, but there is little evidence to support these claims (Mate, 2011). Based on this backdrop, the study sought to investigate how Leadership influenced strategy execution in public secondary schools in Kenya: case study of Machakos Sub-County.

## **3. Literature review**

According to a report by Cater and Pucko (2010), while a well-formulated strategy, a strong and effective pool of skills, and human capital are extremely important resources for strategy success, poor leadership is one of the main obstacles in successful strategy implementation. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) suggested that in the absence of effective leadership, conflicting priorities will result in poor coordination. Research on examining leadership competencies between for-profit vs. public and non-profit leaders concurred that commonly referenced competencies for successful strategy implementation include; communication, technical competence, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, decision making, strategic/visionary thinking, customer focus, team leadership and influence skills. Coordination of activities, streamlining of processes, aligning the organizational structure, and keeping employees motivated and committed to strategy implementation are key responsibilities of the leadership (Thach & Thompson 2007). Beer and Eisenstat (2000) referred to poor coordination across functions and inadequate down the-line leadership skills and development as killers of strategy implementation. Zaribaf and Bayrami (2010) categorized the leadership's importance into three key roles; managing the strategic process, managing relationships, and managing manager training.

Researchers have also examined the influence of hierarchical leadership in implementing strategies. O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, Lapiz, Self, and William's (2010) study concluded that it was only when leaders' effectiveness at different levels (hierarchies) was considered in the aggregate that significant performance improvement occurred while implementing strategies. Schaap (2006) stated that top management and leadership behaviour affect the success of implementation of the strategy. Several studies treat institutional relationships among different units/departments and different strategy levels as a significant factor that affects the outcome of strategy implementation (Chimanzi & Morgan, 2005).

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The research design was a descriptive and targeted sixty-eight (68) public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County which were in existence when strategic planning was introduced to public secondary schools in 2005 with the principals as the population units. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) suggest a sample of 20% to 50% as a good and representative of a population. A sample size of fifty eight (58) schools was determined using Coolican (2004) sample size determination at 95% confidence level. A sample of 10% of respondents was involved in the pilot test which translated to six (6) respondents.

Test for validity was assessed through experts who established whether all the constructs that appertains to strategy execution were considered for the study. On reliability, the questionnaire constructs were tested using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient,  $\alpha$  with values of values of above 0.7 being obtained. Data analysis procedures employed involved both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis by grouping the main themes of the respondents. Quantitative data used frequency tables for both frequency distributions and percentages and the final data was presented using tables and bar charts for easier interpretation. Regression analysis was used to perform the t and f-tests and assisted in establishing the effect of leadership on strategy execution in public secondary schools in Kenya: case study of Machakos Sub - County.

#### **5. Findings**

The principals were to indicate their level of agreement on statements related to influence of leadership on strategy execution in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County. Their responses were rated on a five point Likert scale where: 1 = strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-agree and 5= strongly agree. The mean and standard deviations were generated from SPSS and are as illustrated in table 1. The findings indicated that majority of the principals agreed; the school management has high level of integrity and spearheads strategy better and get trusted by employees (Mean=4.0541); management staffs are all well aware of the school strategy (Mean=3.9189); the school awards incentives to employees who perform well (Mean=3.8649); the school involves students in strategy execution (Mean=3.8378); the school is able to effectively co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of its priority tasks (Mean=3.8378); the school has both financial and non-financial incentives to motivate staff in strategy execution (Mean=3.8378); the school has appointed a "Champion" to spearhead the strategy implementation process (Mean=3.3243) respectively.

From the above table 4.10, it infers that leadership was a strategic factor that significantly influenced strategy execution in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County. Through good leadership, the management integrity in executing their managerial mandate was actualized, enhanced management support for strategy execution, stakeholders' ownership of strategy execution was enhanced, staff morale remained high through managements' financial and non-financial motivation efforts, and achievement of effective co-ordination and monitoring of the strategy execution processes. However, some respondents pointed out to inadequate stakeholders support as the drawback they experienced in providing leadership to the strategic plan implementation.

The findings are in agreement with Beer and Eisenstat (2000) and Thach and Thompson (2007) who established that leadership significantly impacted on strategy execution in institutions. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) established that in the absence of effective leadership, conflicting priorities will result in poor coordination. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) also revealed that poor coordination across functions and inadequate down the-line leadership skills and development as killers of strategy implementation. Schaap (2006) stated that top management and leadership behaviour affect the success of implementation of the strategy. According to Thach and Thompson (2007) who examined leadership competencies between for-profit vs. public and non-profit, the commonly referenced competencies for successful strategy implementation include; communication, technical competence, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, decision making, strategic/visionary thinking, customer focus, team leadership and influence skills. Coordination of activities, streamlining of processes, aligning the organizational structure, and keeping employees motivated and committed to strategy implementation are key responsibilities of the leadership.

## 6. Conclusion

The study established that; the school management of many of the studied schools has high level of integrity and spearheads strategy better and get trusted by employees; management staffs are all well aware of the school strategy; the school awards incentives to employees who perform well; the school involves students in strategy execution; the school is able to effectively co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of its priority tasks; the school has both financial and non-financial incentives to motivate staff in strategy execution and; the school has appointed a “Champion” to spearhead the strategy implementation process.

Therefore, leadership was a strategic factor that significantly influenced strategy execution in public secondary schools in Machakos Sub-County. Through good leadership, the management integrity in executing their managerial mandate was actualized, enhanced management support for strategy execution, stakeholders’ ownership of strategy execution was enhanced, staff morale remained high through managements’ financial and non-financial motivation efforts, and achievement of effective co-ordination and monitoring of the strategy execution processes.

The study recommends that the government should closely monitor the leadership of secondary schools to ensure compliance with recommended leadership practices by the principals.

**TABLE 1**

S/No.	Influence of leadership on strategy execution	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	The school management has high level of integrity and spearheads strategy better and get trusted by employees	4.0541	.84807
2.	Management staffs are all well aware of the school strategy	3.9189	.75933
3.	The school involves students in strategy execution	3.8378	.79977
4.	The school has appointed a “Champion” to spearhead the strategy implementation process	3.3243	.88362
5.	The school is able to effectively co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of its priority tasks	3.8378	.68773
6.	The school has both financial and non-financial incentives to motivate staff in strategy execution	3.8378	.76425
7.	The school awards incentives to employees who perform well	3.8649	.85512

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