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## **Effect of School Culture on Implementation of School Strategic Plans: A Case of Mathira Sub-county, Nyeri County, Kenya**

**Margaret Kangai Kirimu**

Student, Kenya Methodist University, Meru, Kenya

**Nephat J. Kathuri**

Lecturer, Nakuru, Kenya

**Esther Thuba**

Lecturer, Kenya Methodist University, Meru, Kenya

### ***Abstract:***

*The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of school culture on the implementation of school strategic plans in public secondary schools in Mathira Sub-County in Nyeri County. Descriptive research design was used in this study. The target population comprised of 40 principals, 520 members of Board of Management and 320 Heads of Departments. A sample of 12 principals, 12 chairpersons of the respective Boards of Management and 96 heads of departments were selected through both simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods. The researcher collected data by administering questionnaires to the principals and Heads of Departments, and conducting interviews for the chairpersons of the respective Board of Management. A pilot study was carried out prior to the main study in order to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. The study established that public secondary schools in Mathira Sub-County had formulated strategic plans but had failed to implement them as planned. This was attributed to a school culture that did not readily embrace new ideas and that was not aligned to the implementation process. Based on these findings, it was concluded that school culture affects the implementations of strategic plans. The study recommends that schools culture should embrace change and the managers should align it to the implementation process.*

**Keywords:** *Public secondary schools, strategic plans, implementation, school culture*

## **1. Introduction**

### ***1.1. Background of the Study***

In Kenya, the need to enhance results based management in order to deliver quality results in the education sector informed the ministerial directive for all education institutions to develop strategic plans (Ministry of Education, 2005). A school strategic plan is a management tool that outlines the goals of a school and the strategies for attaining them within a stipulated time (Hill & McShane, 2009). Strategic plan implementation on the other hand, is the action of moving an institution along the identified road map in order to fulfill its mission and hence, achieve its vision (MacLennan, 2012). According to Bitange, Kipchumba and Magutu (2010) implementation of strategic plans determines the success of an institution as it leads to achievement of set goals. Unfortunately, a common complaint of organizations about strategic planning is that it produces a document that more often than not ends up collecting dust on the office shelves (Mc Namara, 2008).

Hrebiniak (2006) posited that implementing a strategic plan is not an easy task because unlike its formulation which is an intellectual activity, implementing it, is a hands-on and action oriented activity requiring not only leadership, but also managerial skills. Bryson (2005), as well as, Thomson, Strickland and Gamble (2008) noted that although implementation of strategic plans is crucial for institutions' success, the low point is that the graveyard of strategic plan implementation is littered with organizations that have failed to make their strategic plans come alive. Atkinson (2006) noted that almost over 50% of the strategies fail at implementation stage. Successful formulation of a strategic plan is not always automatically followed by a successful implementation. The implementation process is inhibited by challenges which sometimes originate from individual barriers such as having too many conflicting priorities, insufficient top team functions, poor communication and inadequate management development. Moreover, Forbes (2011) noted that some institutions have strategic plans simply because sense declares that every good organization must have a plan and hence have less commitment in implementing them.

In his study Hreclous (2008) noted that strategic planning concentrates more with the processes involved in formulating a strategic plan giving less attention to actions taken to implement strategic plans. Gregory (2007) in his study, "A systems approach to strategic

management”, attributes failure of strategic plan implementation to successive dominance of different reductionist approaches to strategic management.

Although extensive studies have been carried out on formulation and implementation of strategic plans in various institutions, few have been carried out on the effect of school culture on the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap by examining the effect of school culture on school strategic plans with reference to public secondary schools in Mathira sub- County in Nyeri County in Kenya.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Concept of Strategic Planning

From the point of view of education, strategic planning is a set of purposeful actions that influence a school in order to effect change. It can also be viewed as a methodology aimed at future change of a present situation. Pearce and Robinson (2007) noted that strategic planning is long term planning in order to achieve a desired vision for a school. It indicates what a school intends to achieve by making choices and decisions about long-term future of a school.

Steiner (2008) argued that strategic planning has been adopted by school managers in order to improve management of schools by effectively coping with the challenges posed by changing nature of the contemporary society. It examines all aspects of a school and plans how the school is going to move forward by providing the big picture of where the school is, where it is going and how it will get there.

Strategic planning combines futurist thinking, objectives analysis of the internal and external environment of an institution, analysis of the goals, values and priorities in order to plan the course of action to ensure an institution’s success and growth. Steven (2008) held that strategic planning is a systematic process that involves steps that identify the current status of an institution including its vision and mission, while taking into consideration its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, strategic objectives, actions plans and monitoring plans. Steven further noted that strategic planning process helps school leadership teams to set directions for their school and monitor achievement of the school’s goals and targets. Besides, strategic planning helps managers to identify strengths and challenges to help build appropriate strategies that will enable the school to achieve its vision. Moreover, strategic planning helps to improve the quality of education offered by a school.

### 2.2. Concept of Strategic Management

Strategic management gained prominence as a style of management in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Its main aim was to provide institutions with a proper manner of implementing strategic plans (Pearce & Robinson, 2007). According to Harrison and John (2009), strategic management refers to a set of managerial decisions and actions that determine the way for long-range performance of an institution. Strategic management involves external and internal scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation (Wheelen & Hunger, 2008). Carter and Pucko (2010) noted that strategic planning can also be used as an evaluation of external opportunities and threats while weighing them against an institution’s strengths and weaknesses.

Scholars in strategic management argue that whereas it is easy to develop a strategic plan implementing it is an uphill task (Thompson, et.al. 2008). For successful implementation, leadership must be provided and appropriate institutional culture created (Leting, 2009). The management has the responsibility of enhancing good vertical basis communication and top-down style of management to mitigate resistance and enhance the implementation process. Furthermore, strategic management deals with strategic plan formulation and also implementation. For successful implementation, the management must examine details on how it formulates and implements the strategic plan. This being because both are considered as two sides of a coin (Kalali, Anvari, Pourezzat & Dastejerdi, 2011).

Strategic management is profitable for an institution because it provides a direction for the institution. It gives a framework for ensuring that decisions concerning the future are taken in an organized and focused manner. Furthermore, strategic management helps to guard against uncertainty and unexpected development, as well as, lending a frame of reference for investment decisions. Finally, strategic management helps in allocating resources according to priority while providing a tactic by which an institution can plan and prepare for the future (Pearce& Robinson, 2008)

According to Wells (1998), strategic management goes beyond the development of a strategic plan. It includes the deployment and implementation of the strategic plan, as well as, measurement and evaluation of the results. Strategic management goes through four stages, namely; environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation. Environmental scanning includes internal and external scanning which involves identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the institution. Scanning also involves analyzing political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors that influence the functioning of the institution. Formulation includes identifying the vision, mission, goals and policies of an institution while implementation includes activities, budgeting procedures.

### 2.3. Implementation of Strategic Plan

Strategic plan implementation refers to how to make the desired changes happen in an institution. Strategic plan implementation provides a checklist of the strategies that will be carried out in the given time frame and also establishes what will be done, the persons to do it, the date by which it will be done and the resources required. Strategic plan implementation is part of strategic management.

Implementing a strategic plan entails converting the strategic plan into action and results. It is a task that involves the whole management team of an institution as it affects every part of it. In the implementation, all managers become implementers and all employees’ participants. Implementation is the most difficult part of the strategic planning process because it involves achieving the

objectives set out in the strategic plan, while remaining alert and flexible to new opportunities as they unfold. For successful implementation of a strategic plan, it must be robust. Although developing a strategic plan is challenging, implementing it is more challenging (Hrebiniak, 2006), because it is operation-driven, time consuming action-oriented, it therefore, involves all members of the institution. It is a process that presents managerial challenges and options to weigh and choose whether it is going to be successful or not. Moreover, it demands people-management skills and lots of perseverance in getting initiatives to move. Furthermore, it involves integrating efforts across groups in the institution and this is not easy (Bossidy & Charan, 2002). The leader of an institution must be actively involved in the implementation process, particularly in building up the morale for it to be successful.

Research reviews indicate that most strategic plans do not get implemented. Allio (2005), after conducting an economic survey of 276 senior operating executives confirms this observation. From the study, it turned out that 57% of the firms were unsuccessful at the stage of executing their strategies. According to Kaplan and Norton (2005), 90% of organizations fail to implement strategic plans effectively and this is attributed to the fact that they focus too much on formulation and too little on implementation. It is worth noting that use of unstructured models of strategic plan implementation leads to poor implementation (Hrebiniak, 2006). The school management must also be able to implement it if it is to bring the intended change and improvements in the school. The principal of a school plays a central role in the implementation process. Successful strategic plan implementation depends on skills of working through others, organizing, motivating and culture-building.

Practitioners state that it is easier to develop a sound strategic plan than it is to make it happen. Implementation of a strategic plan is challenging for managers because of the many tasks involved. Firstly, it involves performing recurring administrative tasks associated with strategic plan implementation. As a strategic plan implementer, the manager, and in a school situation, the principal, can either opt for an active, visible role or a low-key, behind the scenes role. He or she may choose to make decisions authoritatively or on the basis of consensus. To successfully implement a strategic plan, the manager ought to be conscious of all that the implementation entails and be able to diagnose the action priorities and in what sequence things need to be done (Thompson & Strickland, 2005). Secondly, it involves creating “fits” between strategic plan and the school’s culture in order to align the whole school behind the strategic plan implementation. Thirdly, it involves figuring out the managerial approach and leadership style to adopt in inducing the needed institutional changes.

#### *2.4. Effect of School culture on Implementation of Strategic Plans*

Culture refers to the collection of values, beliefs and attitudes that are shared by the members of an organization (Hill & McShane 2009). A school’s culture includes the shared beliefs, norms and values within a school. It is dynamic and it is continually being constructed and shaped through interactions with others (Finnan, 2010). Furthermore, school culture develops as staff members interact with each other, the students and community. Culture guides behaviour among members of the school fraternity and also controls the way members interact with each other and with stakeholders within and without an institution. Besides, it enhances integration, as well as, coordination within the institution.

Culture does not only give institutional members ability to develop a collective identity but also guides them in relationships, communication, decision making and in their daily relationships (Schein, 2005). Additionally, strong cultures encourage successful implementation of strategic plans, while weak cultures are a stumbling block. Strong cultures support shared beliefs in norms, practices and virtues within an institution that help strengthen everyone’s resolve to carry out their different roles in strategic plan implementation.

According to Schein (2005), culture is the most difficult organizational attribute to change, and yet the implementation of strategic plans triggers changes within an institution. Schein views culture at three levels. The first level comprises of organizational attributes that can be seen, felt and heard by the uninitiated observer while the second level deals with the professed culture of an institution’s members. This includes the institutions slogans, mission statements and other operational creeds. The third level includes the tacit assumptions. These are the elements of culture which are often taboo to discuss within an organization.

To ensure successful implementation of strategic plans, the leaders should create a culture that supports the strategic plan. They should align the culture to the strategic plan with the aim of ensuring maximum support of strategic plan implementation. The management should also strive to change the culture that is contrary to the strategies to be implemented in order to solicit support for the implementation process. Additionally, the institution’s management is supposed to get the correct match between the culture and strategy in order to ensure successful implementation of the strategic plan.

For effective implementation of strategic plans, the schools need a culture of risk taking. A risk culture is effective when it enables and rewards employees within the organization for taking the right risks. Implementing a strategic plan requires taking risks as risk culture affects ability of an institution to make strategic decisions (Gregory, 2007). In addition, Donald (2006) noted that the implementation of the strategic plan should not introduce changes that conflict with the institution’s culture otherwise there will be resistance.

All members of an institution should be encouraged to participate in modeling a culture that supports changes that the implementation of strategic plan will cause in the institution. Moreover, implementation demands a culture of achievement, discipline and ownership of the strategy. To avoid resistance to change, de-motivation and for a smooth implementation of a strategic plan, there should be synergy between strategy and culture. Additionally, a school culture that influences the support to a strategic plan strengthens the implementation process (Finnan, 2010).

### 3. Research Design

A research design is a presentation of the plan of investigation aimed at answering set research questions (Shuttleworth, 2008; Lesage, 2009). Furthermore, it is a detailed plan on how the research will be conducted, the glue that holds all the elements of the research project together (Donald, 2006). This research adopted a descriptive research design. It was preferred because it is concerned with conditions that exist, practices that triumph and people's culture. Besides, this design helped the researcher to ascertain and describe characteristics of the variable under study (Kothari 2004). In this study, the researcher was interested in getting facts about the effect of culture on the implementation of strategic plan implementation by asking respondents about their individual perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and values.

### 4. Data Analysis and Presentation

#### 4.1. Effects of School Culture on Implementation of Strategic Plans

The study sought to establish the effect of school culture on the implementation of strategic plans. The participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed on the statements about school culture as an element of strategic plan implementation. The school culture was measured by statements positively stated. The participants were expected to agree or disagree by ticking in the appropriate column ranging from SA=strongly agree to SD=strongly disagree. The results are shown in Table 1.

From the responses, all schools (100%) that participated in the study had vision and mission statements. This meant that the schools had a specific collection of values, beliefs and attitudes that were shared by the employees (Hill & McShane 2010). Vision and mission statements relate to an institutions purpose and they communicate that purpose to the stakeholders. A school strategic plan emanates from the school's vision and mission.

Majority of the respondents, (80 %) agreed that the vision and mission statements were widely shared. It is in the process of sharing that the vision and mission statements are clarified. The positive responses therefore imply that the vision and mission statements were to a great extent understood by the study participants. This was alluded to by the respondents when they responded to the last statement about clarity of the vision and mission statements. However, 8.7% were undecided and 11.8% disagreed. When the vision and mission of the school is widely shared, chances of the stakeholders embracing it are higher. Besides, it is easier to align the goals and objectives of the school to the vision and mission statement when they are widely shared. Implementation of strategic plans is enhanced, henceforth.

Respondents gave varied responses on whether employees were involved in decision making. A majority of 55.6 % agreed that they were actively involved but 37.6 % disagreed. A minority of 6.45% were undecided. Involvement in decision making affects implementation of strategic plans. When employees participate in decision making process their understanding of the decisions made is improved. They are better placed to implement the strategic plan because they do not only understand it, but also own it. Involvement in decision making increases team work leading to effectiveness and efficiency in the performance of duties

Culture	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Existent of vision and mission statements	85	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vision and mission are widely shared	7	7.5	61	71.8	7	8.2	5	5.9	5	5.9
Employees participate in decision making	4	4.7	44	51.6	5	6.45	11	12.9	21	24.7
Tolerating risks	6	7.1	23	27.1	11	12.9	16	18.8	29	34.1
Embraces new ideas	5	5.3	20	23.6	5	6.5	31	36.6	24	27.9
Management relates well with stakeholders	15	17.2	41	48.4	2	2.15	11	12.9	16	19.3
Employees are highly motivated	9	10.7	12	13.9	10	11.8	38	45.1	16	18.3
Vision and mission statements are clear to all	7	8.6	28	33.3	13	15.1	27	31.2	10	11.8

Table 1: Effect of School Culture on Implementation of the Strategic Plan

From the results, whereas 34.2% agreed that the schools had a culture of tolerating risks, 52.9% disagreed and 12.9% were undecided. For effective implementation of strategic plans, a school ought to have a culture that supports risk taking. Furthermore, 28.9% agreed that the schools embraced new ideas against 64.5% who disagreed. A minority of 6.5% were undecided on whether schools embraced new ideas. Failure to embrace new ideas is a hindrance to the success in the implementation of strategic plan implementation. According to Schein (2005), implementation of strategic plans triggers changes within an institution. Furthermore, majority of the participants (65.6%) agreed that the management relates well with all the stakeholders. However, 32.2% of the participants disagreed with this statement. Two (2.35%) out of the 85 participants were undecided.

From the study findings, 24.6% agreed that the employees were highly motivated and 11.8 % were undecided. Majority of the participants (63.4 %) disagreed that employees were highly motivated. Lack of motivation among the employees was a challenge to the strategic plan implementation process. To ensure successful implementation, the factors causing de-motivation among the employees need to be addressed.

From the study findings, 41.9% agreed that the mission and vision statements are clear to the stakeholders. However, 43% of the respondents disagreed with this and 15.1 % were undecided. For successful implementation of strategic plans, the implementation team should have a clear understanding of the school's vision and mission statements. Whereas the mission and vision statements

highlight what an institution values and what it wants to become, a strategic plan gives a road map on how to realize them. Lack of a clear understanding of the two fundamental statements can become a barrier to the implementation of a strategic plan.

## 5. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Summary

Firstly, the study revealed that culture affected implementation of strategic plans. The schools had clearly defined vision and mission statements. Majority of the schools had widely shared vision and mission statements. However, as to whether the vision and mission statements were clearly understood, the participants were equally divided (41.9 % agreed while 43% disagreed). Moreover, majority of the employees were not highly motivated. Furthermore, the schools did not have a culture of tolerating risks and embracing new ideas.

### 5.2. Conclusion

The study revealed that the school culture affects implementation of strategic plans. Schools do not operate in a value-free vacuum. Culture is a very significant foundation of morale and social motivation. Their operations are governed and directed by the school culture. Implementation of strategic plans triggers a cultural change and whether the implementation process will be successful or not, depends on how well the stakeholders are prepared for the change. Most of the schools do not have a well-entrenched culture which is subsequently a challenge to the effective implementation of the strategic plan.

### 5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the managers of public secondary schools should strive to align the school culture to the strategic plan implementation. The managers need to look for ways to encourage employees to adjust their values and beliefs towards the school. It is also upon the managers to come up with ways of addressing issues of culture lest they hinder the implementation process as most schools do not have a culture of embracing new ideas. Schools also do not have a culture of risk taking. Besides, they should look for ways of motivating their employees.

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