Culture's role in the implementation of strategic plans in non-governmental organizations in Kenya

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Full Length Research

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Accepted 19th, March 2013

Modern organizations have embraced strategic planning as a key element to the success of organization and this study seeks to investigate how culture affects the implementation of strategic plans. Prior studies from various researchers have indicated that many organizations have ideally practiced strategic planning but the implementation process remains a challenge, resulting in well-formulated strategies that fail at the implementation stage. Existing research on strategic planning have focused on relationships between various factors that impact on the strategy implementation. This study departs from the previous studies looking into relationships and endeavored to establish the influence of culture in the implementation of strategic plans in NGOs in Kenya. To achieve the main objective, a survey of 258 NGOs was conducted from a population frame of 2588 NGOs operating in Nairobi District under the youth, relief, micro-finance, welfare and health sectors. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The main instrument of data collection was a questionnaire containing both open-ended and closed questions, which was administered on all levels of staff judged to be equipped with the relevant information on communication related to strategy implementation in the sampled NGOs. Selected staff were also interviewed. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis, in particular using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The study results indicate that organizational culture affects implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan NGOs. Based on the findings, the study has recommended that organization cultures be promoted to enhance the spirit of embracing strategic plans implementation at all stages.

Key Words: Organizational culture, rewarding, non-governmental organizations, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Different concepts of culture, stem from two distinct disciplines, anthropology and sociology. The concepts have been applied to organizational studies since the early 1980’s (Schein, 1988). Anthropology views culture as a metaphor for organizations, defining organizations as being cultures. On the other hand, sociology takes on the functionalist view and defines culture as something an organization possesses. Despite the separate definitions of organizational culture, there seems to be a movement towards a general consensus.

The most widely used organizational culture framework is that of Edgar Schein (1988) who adopts the functionalist view and described culture as a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation, and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid. This culture therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Ansoff and McDonnell (1990) have observed that corporate culture requires internal integration such that collective identity and togetherness determines day to day communications, acceptable behaviours and power allocations in the organization structures. Similarly, external adaptation for dealing with outside environment will be very much in need when trying to implement a strategic plan. Aosa (1992) has also added that the environment of an organization will affect how the culture relates to implementation. He argues that for external
focus, such culture could be adaptability or mission culture whereas an internal focus could lean the organization’s culture towards clan-based or bureaucratic culture. Awino (2007) found out that corporate culture requires collective identity and togetherness in order to determine day-to-day communications, acceptable/non-acceptable behaviour as well as power/status allocation. These are important aspects in implementation of organizational plans and this study scanned the cultures in various NGOs in Kenya, and sought to determine whether organizational culture affects implementation of strategic plans.

There is evidence of gaps in the implementation of strategic plans within Kenyan NGOs. In its 5th Corporate Plan, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) noted implementation of strategy as a weakness, and created a Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation department to ensure effective planning and implementation of the plans (5th Corporate Plan 2009-2013, 2009). In a similar move, the Young Women’s Christian Association of Kenya (YWCA) created Oversight Teams to monitor implementation of the Strategic Plan 2008-2011, after realizing that about half of the strategic objectives in the current plan had been carried down from the previous strategic period, implying challenges in implementation (YWCA, 2008). Similarly, lack of implementation of strategic plans in their entirety impacts negatively on effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the said NGOs.

Aosa (1992) focused on intercultural involvement related to strategy implementation in manufacturing firms. That represented an important aspect of factors that influence implementation leaving a gap for non-manufacturing entities to be pursued by other scholars. Thompson, Strickland and Gamble (2007) and Evans (2007) propose further studies on culture in instilling high levels of commitment to strategic success and lack of detailed planning to support goal achievement. This study therefore investigates organization culture as factor affecting the implementation of Strategic Plans in NGOs in Kenya.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a survey research plan. Cooper and Schindler (2008) define a survey research as systematic gathering of information from a sample of respondents for the purpose of understanding and/or predicting some aspects of the behaviour of the population of interest. The study sought to establish how organization resources affect the implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan NGOs.

The study population target consisted of the 2,588 NGOs based in Nairobi District and operating in the sectors of Youth, Relief, Micro-Finance, Welfare and Health. NGOs operating in these five selected sectors provided a fair representation of NGOs in Kenya practicing implementation of strategic plans. Stratified sampling was used to give 258 NGOs. The study grouped the population into five strata according to the sector of operation, namely, Youth, Micro-Finance, Relief, Welfare and Health. At least ten percent sample of the population was considered a generally acceptable method of selecting samples in such a study (Stanley and Gregory, 2001; Kothari, 2004).

This study applied mixed instruments in which more than one instrument were used and is referred to as triangulation. Sekaran (2006), Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2006) observe that triangulation involves the use of more than one form of data collection in a study. The research used four instruments including questionnaires, interviews, observations and desk studies. Reliability was tested for study instruments producing Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient scores of over 0.8 while university professors supervising the study tested face validity. The field work observed and interviewed staff to explore the effectiveness of various aspects of their daily culture in implementation policies and methods such as contained in strategic action planning. Change management was tested through observations and questionnaires to identify or not, the organization culture helped in achievement of strategic objectives.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The study aimed to explore the relationship between effective implementation of strategic plans and the culture of the organization by assessing the extent to which organizational culture influences the effective implementation of strategic plans. Several tests were carried out as highlighted in the next sections.

**Group statistics for organization culture**

Table 1 shows statistics across the groups on extent of influence of organizational culture on implementation of strategic plans. The organizations culture can either be effective or none effective towards the influence on implementation of strategic plans. The table shows that the group means of implementation of strategic plans are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you describe your organization culture in relation to implementation of strategic plan as ”Effective”?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not effective</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>53.2293</td>
<td>14.65930</td>
<td>1.50401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60.4297</td>
<td>20.14840</td>
<td>3.74146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
different between the groups of extent of influence of organizational culture. The mean of implementation of strategic plans in the group of effective influence of organizational culture 60.430 is greater than the mean of implementation of strategic plans in the group of non effective influence of organizational culture 53.230. This shows that there is a relationship between organization culture and effective implementation of strategic plans. It also shows that effective organization culture is better for effective implementation of strategic plans than a not effective culture. The standard deviations of the two also differ. The standard deviation for effective organizational culture is 20.148 while that for not effective organization culture is 14.659. The larger standard deviation connotes that there is a risk of the existence of other factors other than effective culture influencing the implementation of strategic plans. Different standard deviations imply different variances which are vital in significant test of equality of means.

**Independent samples test**

This test was done to confirm that the two means of implementation of strategic plans between the two groups are actually different with statistical significance. This was done using the student’s t test on equality of means assuming equal variances. On table 2, Levene’s test on equality of variances show that the variances are significantly equal since the significance of the statistic is 0.007 which is less than 0.05.

Consequently assuming equality of variance, the significance of the t-statistic is 0.037 which is less than 0.05 which implies rejection of the null hypothesis that there is no significance difference in the mean of effective implementation of strategic plans between the two groups. The alternative hypothesis is accepted that the mean of implementation of strategic plans in the group of those saying that organizational culture has an effective influence towards achievement of strategic plans is not equal to the mean of implementation of strategic plans in the group of those saying that organizational culture has a non effective influence towards achievement of strategic plans. The mean of effective implementation of strategic plans is significantly higher in an organization with an effective organizational culture than in an organization with none effective organizational culture. This shows that there is a significant relationship between organizational culture and effective implementation of strategic plans. The more effective organizational culture is, the more effective the implementation of strategic plans.

According to (Johnson and Scholes, 1999) the culture of an organization is expected to be supportive of and consistent with the strategy being implemented. This is in line with the findings of this study. They say corporate culture gives employees a sense of how to behave and act and hence influencing employees to support current strategy in order to strengthen its implementation. Since it is managers who were involved in developing strategic plans, it is part of their leadership tasks to bring the organization’s culture into alignment with strategy and keep it there. Other scholars also brings out that organizational culture fosters innovativeness of employees. By providing employees with opportunities to explore, investigate and experiment, bounded delegation leadership creates an entrepreneurial organization culture that fosters innovative behavior (Amabile et al., 1996; Woodman et al., 1993; Sackmann, 2003, 2006; Ulwick, 2002; Anand et al., 2007).

**Regression analysis**

Further to the test for equality of means regression analysis was done to test the extent of influence that culture has on implementation of strategic plans. Table 3 shows that the correlation coefficient (R) is 95.0%. This shows a strong relationship between effective implementation of strategic plans and effective organizational culture. It further shows 90.2% of the variation of implementation of strategic plans is due to variation in effective organizational culture. This implies that the data strongly fit the regression model.

A further test on the beta coefficient as in table 4 shows a positive relationship between implementation of

### Table 2: Independent samples test equality of means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Implementation</th>
<th>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>7.538</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-1.786</td>
<td>37.489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
strategic plans and organizational culture. The coefficient of the extent to which organizational culture influences the achievement of organizations strategic objectives 0.746 is significantly greater than zero since the significance of the t statistic 0.000 is less than 0.05. This implies that organizational culture actually has a positive effect on implementation of strategic plans. Increasing the level of organization culture by a unit would increase the level of implementation of strategic plans by 0.746.

This is also in line with the findings of scholars on the influence of organizations culture on implementation of strategies. The culture of an organization is expected to be supportive of and consistent with the strategy being implemented (Johnsson and Scholes, 1999). Corporate culture gives employees a sense of how to behave and act and hence influencing employees to support current strategy in order to strengthen its implementation. An entrepreneurial organizational culture fosters innovativeness of employees (Amabile et al., 1996; Woodman et al., 1993; Sackmann, 2003, 2006; Ulwick, 2002; Anand et al., 2007). In an entrepreneurial culture members of the organization identify opportunities and risks based on their perceptions of the internal and external organizational environment, integrate available resources, and bring in other individuals to enable them to undertake creative and innovative ventures (Sternberg, Kaufman and Pretz, 2003; Mumford and Licuanan, 2004; Chen, 2007). Innovative ideas are requirements to effective implementation of strategic plans.

Summary of major findings

Statistical tests showed that there is indeed a high significance and relationship between the organizational culture and implementation of strategic plans in NGOs. Kenyan NGOs were found to show culture aspects in many ways to prove that their success is enshrined in their culture. Results also indicated that successful NGOs had their staff indicating a welcoming culture and with a sense of accepting criticism when corrected on any aspect for example in giving directions on how to handle or fill a questionnaire or making clarifications on an item already filled on the questionnaire. The findings have therefore shown potential for great success by NGOs that can embrace a good culture and inculcate it in all their plans and activities. This indicates that indeed culture has a great effect on the implementation of strategic plans in NGOs in Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study findings indicated a positive relationship between implementation of strategic plans and culture which was in conformity with Robinson and Pearce (2006) assertion that effective culture strengthen their strategic orientation by anticipating the challenges and problems of an organization through creating an conducive atmosphere for employees to perform their part of the strategic plan implementation. The findings of this study produced tests that proved there is a high significance between implementation of strategic plans and organization culture and it can conclusively be confirmed that culture greatly affects implementation of strategic plans in NGOs in Kenya. Based on the study findings that have important theoretical and practical value to academicians and practicing managers in NGOs the following recommendations were made:

- Effective implementation of strategic plans was dependent on appropriate change environment for employees of an organization
- Rewarding is a motivating culture that organizations should cultivate in their systems
- Policy makers should have non-discriminatory tendencies in all aspects of strategic plan implementation and embrace a culture of inclusiveness in their decision making
- Regular training with shared values and involvement of stakeholders is a culture that enhances commitment and should be enhanced by organizations

REFERENCES


