Analysis of factors influencing formulation of strategic plans in Embu North District, Embu County, Kenya

Njagi Elias Njeru

Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

Muathe M. A. Stephen

Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

muathesm@yahoo.com

Muchemi Ann Wambui

Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

The issue of organisational direction for organisations worldwide has generated growing interest in the recent past. As a result, formation of strategic plan by many organisations has attracted growing concerns due to environmental pursuit of organisational growth and survival in the long run. This study explores the link between formulation of school strategic plans with employee motivation, availability of funds, support by top school leadership, government policy and employee knowhow. The paper specifically analyses the factors that influence the formulation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Embu North District, Embu County, Kenya. The study was carried out in 24 public secondary schools in Embu North District, Embu County, Kenya. The following persons were involved; 24 Principals, 24 Chairpersons of Board of Governors and 24 Chairpersons of Parents Teachers Association in all the schools. Data was collected primarily through structured questionnaire and analysed using spearman's rank correlation analysis. The findings at 0.05 significance level indicated that employee motivation, availability of funds, support by top school leadership, government policy and employee skills had a statistical relationship with formulation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Embu North district.

Keywords: Formulation of Strategic Plan, Employee Motivation, Availability of Funds, Support by Top School Leadership, Government Policy and Employee Know how

1. INTRODUCTION

A strategic plan is a set of processes undertaken in order to develop a range of strategies that will contribute to achieving the organizational direction (Tapinos et al., 2005). This therefore calls for formulation of a coherent document which will guide the efforts of all the stakeholders, outline what the organization is trying to achieve and how it intends to achieve it. Strategies can be formulated in three levels that is; corporate, business and functional level. At corporate level strategies are formulated by the top level management or the board of directors (Yabs, 2010). At business level strategies are formulated by middle level managers for example; human resource manager, marketing manager, production manager among others (Yabs, 2010). Strategy formulation at functional level is done by first line managers or supervisors (Sababu, 2007).

In a school situation, at corporate level the long term decisions and strategies are made by the Board of Governors in consultation with the school Principal. Heads of departments make decisions on business level strategies, offer leadership and play a key role in formulation of strategic plans in their institutions. Parents and teachers being key stakeholders present their interests through the Parents Teachers Association. In addition they are very critical in strategic implementation. Before strategy formulation is done, the management must analyse the environment using tools such as SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, Porters five forces model, competitor analysis, customer analysis and gap analysis among others (Aldehayyat, Al Khattab and Anchor, 2011).

The Porters five forces is a useful tool for analysing a school environment in order to identify the rival school competitors and what is it that they are doing that make them better than the school in question. When a school uses this tools it is able to put in place measures that can make it be as competitive as others in a similar environment. This will be possible after addressing the weaknesses and threats when SWOT analysis has been conducted. In addition it is only through use of such tools that the school will be able to identify the needs of its customers who are learners and thereby respond to them appropriately.

The PESTEL is a very relevant tool in a school set up. This is because it helps the school management to identify the impact of politics, economics, social, legal, and technological aspects on its operations. This will help the School management to act appropriately. Failure to use this tool and respond appropriately after analysis of the school operations and its environment, it will be difficult to respond appropriately to the needs of its customers and as a result the school will become irrelevant. This will be evidenced by low enrolment of students.

Once the environment has been analysed using the appropriate tools, the school management is able to craft or redefine the organisations vision, mission and organisational values. It is followed by identifying the critical issues to be addressed which may include improvement of academic performance, infrastructure, sourcing of funds, student and staff discipline, staff motivation and improvement of students participation in co-curricular activities among others. Giles (1995), Aldehyyat et al. (2011) and Ngware et al. (2006) have pointed out that a school that formulates and implements strategic plan derives benefits such as having negotiated and agreed clear goals and objectives, communication of the set goals to various stake holders, providing a base upon which progress can be measured, building strong and functional teams in management staff who have clear vision on how the school will be in future, providing the school management with new ideas which can steer the school to greater heights of excellence and lastly commits the school funds to a well organised and coherent development agenda.

Schools have several objectives to fulfil in line with the national and international goals of education. Kenya is one of the countries which signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and one of the goals is Education for all (EFA) by year 2015 (Sinyolo, 2007). The achievement of these goals will depend on how well education programmes are planned and implemented. This calls for preparation of a national education strategic plan upon which schools should base their strategic plans. The Kenya government regularly formulates and implements strategic plans with the most recent one covering year 2006-2011. Many schools have not followed suit (Ngware et al., 2006).

Some governments have made it mandatory for schools to formulate strategic plans in line with the national strategic plan, for example; in Australia, the government has gone a step ahead and made a guideline of what schools should include in their strategic plan (State of Victoria, 2010) and the United Kingdom government passed the 1988 Education Reform Act which gave the responsibility of planning to schools (Giles, 1995). Bell (2002) records that in 1989, the UK government put emphasis on the staff to develop their own priorities and come up with strategies to achieve them. Later the strategic plans were used by the government as focal points for national inspection framework. This means that the teachers were required to show their achievements during routine inspections using parameters they had set in the strategic plans. Bell (2002) reports that currently UK government has come up with a system of deriving targets for schools from the national targets set for different categories of schools.

The Government of Kenya should come up with a similar system of guiding schools on what they need to include in their strategic plans. In addition Quality Assurance and

Standards Officers of the Ministry of Education can train school stakeholders on formulating strategic plans. Kenyan government has also made it compulsory for government agencies and ministries to make periodic strategic plans (GoK, 2006). In Kenya, the education Act (GoK, 1980) does not clearly show whether schools must formulate strategic plans and as a result many schools have not followed suit. Literature review has attributed this problem to availability of funds (Allio, 2005; Recklies, 2008), employee motivation of the staff (Recklies, 2008), support by top school leadership (Recklies, 2008), employee's know-how (Jackson, 2005; Drucker, 2004) and government policy (Recklies, 2008).

Secondary school education in Kenya has undergone numerous changes which have always necessitated the need for continuous planning. After independence the primary aim for secondary school education was to fight disease, poverty and ignorance. GoK (2005) has outlined the steps taken to solve the problem of ignorance through various commissions and task forces. These commissions include; the Ominde report 1964 which focused on fostering national unity and creating sufficient human capital; Gachathi Report 1976 focused on redefining Kenya's education policies and objectives; Mackay Report 1981 recommended removal of the Advanced level (A - level) of secondary education and establishment of 8.4.4 system of education; Kamunge Report 1988 focused on improving education, financing, quality and relevance and finally Koech Report 2000 which recommended TIQET (Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training). Recent government policy initiatives have focused on attainment of Education for all (EFA) in Kenya which led to declaration of Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. All these changes require continuous planning of secondary school education so as to realize the government objectives in education. A survey by Ngware et al. (2006) showed that over 60% of schools in the country do not have strategic plans. A base line study in conducted in the district showed that only two out of the twenty four secondary schools in the district had formulated and were implementing strategic plans and this represents only 8.3 % of all eligible schools. The rationale of the study was therefore, to find out the factors influencing formulation of strategic plans in Secondary Schools in Embu North District.

1.1 Hypotheses

There is a relationship between the employee motivation and formulation of school strategic plans.

There is a relationship between the availability of funds and formulation of school strategic plans.

There is a relationship between the top school and formulation of school strategic plans.

There is a relationship between Government policy and formulation of school strategic plans.

There is a relationship between employee knowhow and formulation of school strategic plans.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars agree that a strategic plan needs to be simple, realistic and neither too ambitious nor insufficiently demanding (Leggate & Thompson, 1997; Aldehyyat et al., 2011). It should allow some degree of flexibility to fit with the changing environment. Mintzberg (1994) adds another perspective by highlighting the danger of planning in that it assumes the world will stop while managers wait to plan and implement strategies. This explains why a strategic plan should be made in a way that it is flexible to accommodate environmental changes. .

Although most of the literature available on strategic management deals with the business world, some parallels can be drawn between the business sector and education sector. Tsiakkiros & Pasiardis (2002) gave the similarities as follows. First, the two sectors try to make a profit but the type of profit differs in both; Two, both have limited resources yet they have unlimited needs and must allocate resources after putting their needs in a sequence of priority; Three, both compete for clients and resources and lastly, both have clients who demand for more satisfaction. The schools get resources from government, parents, donors and other income generating projects to implement the projects they identify. These resources are hardly enough.

Perrot (1996) argued that if the public sector is to meet their challenges, they must look up to private sector for guidance. The private sector has benefited in formulating strategic plans and schools can enjoy the same benefits. Giles (1995); Aldehayyat et al. (2011) and Ngware et al. (2006) have discussed some benefits of strategic plan to a school as follows: First, the school develops clear and agreed upon vision, mission, goals and objectives. The target areas are put in a clear way and the means to achieve them. Secondly, it helps to communicate the set goals to all members and stakeholders. It is therefore necessary to display the motto, vision, mission, goals and objectives in conspicuous places where all the stakeholders can see.

Thirdly, it provides a base upon which progress can be measured. This is important for monitoring and evaluation since key action areas are measured on predetermined standards. Four, it helps to build strong teams in management staff who have a clear vision of how the

school will be in future. This means that change of management cannot interfere with the priorities set out. Five, it opens the school management to new ideas which if implemented, can steer the school into greater heights of excellence and lastly, it commits the school funds to a well-organized and coherent development agenda. This protects the school from having many incomplete projects, dilapidated infrastructure and misplaced priorities.

Ngware et al. (2006) proposes that for teachers to provide quality education they must be well qualified and motivated. Bell (2002) proposes that teachers must be proactive and seek to influence the external environment and deploy resources to influence it. This may call for teachers to formulate appropriate strategies meant to realize set goals. A lowly motivated staff may avoid such strategies or absent themselves during the time of strategy formulation (Bennell, 2004). Absenteeism has theoretical basis from Herzberg theory (1966) and worker's- adjustment- to equilibrium strategy (Allen, 1981). According to Herzberg, absenteeism may be linked to job dissatisfaction with terms and conditions of employment such as supervision, organizational policies, salary, job security, interpersonal relationship and physical environment.

Ngware et al. (2006) argues that if teachers are taken for training to increase their skills they will be motivated and especially if they are given a chance to put their skills to practice. This makes them they feel part of the decision making process when they are allowed to sit in committees to formulate the strategic plans.

Funds should also be available to train the teams so that each can know the responsibilities and expectations (Jackson, 2005). Funds are critical during the data collection stage when collection of information from the environment is required. It may involve traveling, holding meetings, or publishing tools for communications such as pamphlets and fliers. Upon formulation, money is required for implementation. A plan should not be formulated if it cannot be implemented. Recklies (2008) is of the opinion that only the programs which yield highest returns should be funded after the key action areas have been identified. In a secondary school, the money comes from the government funding/ government grant, parents' contribution, income-generating projects within the school, donors, and bursary.

The top school leadership in a school includes the Board of Governors, Parents Teachers Association and the school Principal. They give leadership and vision to the organization. The Principal has for a long time been expected to offer leadership on matters of quality improvement in schools (Ngware et al., 2006). This view has however been challenged by some scholars. Bell (2002) is of the opinion that a school principal cannot offer leadership on school vision since it is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders. He further argues that

successful planning must include the three levels of management in the school. A study done by Leggate & Thompson (1997) found that the Principal was regarded as key player in strategy formulation. A contradiction is revealed when Giles (1995) found out that the strategic planning process was highly dominated by principals and their deputies. It can be said that although the Principals are instrumental in leading the process, they need the input of all the stakeholders.

Another perspective of support by top management is looking at the period that they have stayed in the school. If a Principal has worked in a school for a long time, he/ she can have the opportunity of engaging the others to formulate the strategic plan. Leggate & Thompson (1997) are of the opinion that if a person only works in a school for a very short period, he may not have an impact in formulating the strategic plan. Transfers by the government from one school to the other bring about this challenge. The top management should be able to convince the parents on the rationale for spending money to formulate a strategic plan since they have the duty to safeguard public interest and give guidance to the stakeholders (Ngware et al., 2006).

The government has a critical role to play in strategy formulation. It is the government that formulates the school curriculum and the broader education policy. Currently, the government is in the process of implementing the strategic plan for education covering year 2006- 2011. The ministry's strategic plan aforementioned is silent on efforts the government is taking to encourage secondary schools in the country to formulate strategic plans. In some countries, the government has made it mandatory for schools to formulate strategic plans for example the government of Australia has made a guideline of what schools should include in their strategic plan (State of Victoria, 2010).

Employee's know-how is useful in formulation of strategic plans and where an organisation does not have qualified manpower she will be forced to outsource. Drucker (2004), states that the first managerial skill is the making of effective decisions. These decisions help one to know what strategic plan should contain. Davies and Ellison (1998) and Dandira (2011a) is of the opinion that the firm must appoint an executive committee which have a vision and a dream beyond everybody in the organization, and which is driven by results.

For the organization to be able to formulate strategies effectively it must have the necessary manpower who posses effective communication skills, interpersonal skills, professional skills and ability to scan an environment in order to be able to predict future events. Effective communication skills are necessary tools for the leader to pass down the

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vision to all the employees and relevant stake holders. Dandira (2011a) is of the opinion that communication should cascade from top to bottom of the firm so that all employees are kept in the light on how the strategic plan is being conceived and what is required of them. This means that managers should not hold back any information in their possession which can be helpful in strategic planning. The professional skills are necessary in strategic planning.

Sherman, Rowley and Armandi (2007) notes that a common problem experienced in Africa is that people are appointed to positions to which they have no matching professional ability. They cite a case where a former army general (who is used to autocratic style of leadership) is appointed to a position of a university administrator which requires democratic style of leadership. This leads to a mismatch between the personalities appointed with the strategies that can work well for the organization. This problem however may not be very acute in the Kenyan secondary schools since the Principals are appointed from the professionally trained teachers. What may be questionable is whether the appointed principals are people with a vision to propel the school.

Employers are required to treat their employees as internal customers who have the ability to give feedback an organizational progress. Dandira (2011b) notes that some board of directors and senior managers go for retreats to make strategic plans without involving their employees. The lower cadre employees may feel left out in formulation and hence they fail to implement the plan effectively. Effective interpersonal skills from top management enable them to involve all the stakeholders to participate actively in the whole process of strategic plan formulation. Continuous learning is very important for any person who wishes to get the skills to scan the environment. Hamid (2008) notes that different people have different ways of acquiring knowledge; some prefer scanning the environment, others reading from the books and internet and others from discussing with their peers. To be able to formulate strategic plans effectively, today's environment requires business minded and innovative employees who after analysing the environment, can be able to develop strategies that are customer focused. Public secondary schools are not exceptional from profit making bodies. They need to focus on customer who is the learner. Sherman et al. (2007) notes that transformational leaders should empower employees and instil a sense of commitment and engagement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was employed in the study to determine whether there is significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables and to ascertain any

association between those variables. Kombo and Tromp (2006) recommend the use of this design when investigating peoples' attitudes and views as they are, without manipulating the variables. In addition Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) assert that descriptive survey design helps a researcher to gather, summarise, present and interpret information for the purpose of clarification. The statistical method used for research analysis was mainly spearman rank correlation technique.

The target population for the study was 24 public secondary schools in Embu North District with a total number of 360 members that is; 24 principals, 96 Parent Teachers Association members and 240 Board of Governors members (DEO, 2011). Since school Strategic plan formulation is a corporate level decision, the researcher sample from the top school managers who possess the pertinent required information. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) proposes that purposive sampling which is a non- probability sampling technique can be used where the subjects are hand picked because they possess the required characteristics or data.

The researcher conducted a census study of the 24 public secondary schools in Embu North District where all the 24 principals, 24 Board of Governors chairpersons and 24 Parent Teachers Association chairpersons were selected. Kombo and Tromp (2006) assert that the use of this sampling technique lies in selecting information rich respondents for in-depth analysis of the issues being discussed. These are the stakeholders involved in making the decision on strategy formulation and they can only invite the other stakeholders such as teachers support staff, parents and local community to give their input.

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through administration of a structured questionnaire while secondary data was collected from publications such as journals, books, official documents from the schools and DEO's office, and relevant internet sites. Pilot study was done in two schools within the district. This was to help clarify and remove questions that were ambiguous or not clear. Borg and Gall (1989) assert that content validity of an instrument is improved through expert judgement and as such the researcher sought assistance of the university supervisor to find out whether the instruments measured what they intended to measure. The data generated from the study was analysed using Spearman's Rank correlation analysis to find out the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Gay, 1992).

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Spearman's Rank Correlation analysis was used because it measures the strength of a relationship between the dependent variable that is formulation of school strategic plans and independent variables that is, Availability of funds, employee motivation, support by top school leadership, government policy and employee know how. The researcher wanted to test the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables so as to provide useful information to school management for planning purposes. Table 4.1 shows the correlation coefficients (rho) between formulation of school strategic plans and the independent variables under study.

The study revealed that there was sufficient statistical evidence that there was a significant relationship between availability of funds and formulation of school strategic plans at 0.05 significance level. The spearman rank correlation coefficient (r) between the two was 0.3 (See table 4.1). Therefore the hypothesis that there is significant relationship between availability of funds and formulation of school strategic plans was not rejected. This is in line with a study conducted by Jackson (2005) who asserted that funds should be available to train teams so that each can know its responsibilities and expectations. Further, Recklies (2008) is of the opinion that only the programmes that have the highest returns should be funded after the key action areas have been identified. The management should therefore ensure they partner with many stake holders in attempt to solicit for funds which are critical in formulation of school strategic plans for example hiring of experts, motivating and training of employees among others.

It was revealed that there was sufficient evidence that there is a statistical significant relationship between government policy and formulation of school strategic plans at 0.05 significance level. The spearman's rank correlation (r) between the two was 0.243 (See Table 4.1). Therefore the hypothesis that there is statistically significant relationship between government policy and formulation of school strategic plans was not rejected. This shows that the Ministry of Education should develop programmes of creating awareness in public secondary school in Embu North District by emphasising the importance of formulating school strategic plans and providing clear policy guidelines on what should be included in the school strategic plans. This has been tried and it has worked in countries like Australia (State of Victoria, 2010). In addition it is important for the government to put in place stringent measures to ensure all schools adhere to the policy guidelines.

The study showed that there was sufficient evidence that there is significant statistical relationship between employee knowhow and formulation of school strategic plans 0.05

significance level. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r) between the two is 0.348 (See Table 4.1). Therefore the hypothesis that there is a relationship between employee knowhow and formulation of school strategic plans was not rejected. This observation concurs with a study done by Sherman et al., (2007) which showed that transformational leaders should empower employees to instil a sense of commitment and engagement. The relationship implies that there is need to impart appropriate skills to employees by way of training programmes which may either be on the job or off job. The training should include courses that provide employees with skills of formulating and implementing school strategic plans.

Table 4.1: Results of Spearman's Rank correlation

Correlations			Formulation of School Strategic Plan	Employee Motivation	Availability of funds	Support by top school leadership	Government Policy	Employee Know how
Spearman's rho	Formulation of School Strategic Plan	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.145	0.030	0.090	-0.243[*]	0.348[**]
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Employee Motivation	Correlation Coefficient	0.145	1.000	-0.236[*]	-0.008	-0.119	0.294[**]
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Availability of funds	Correlation Coefficient	0.030	-0.236[*]	1.000	0.387[**]	-0.128	-0.045
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Support by top school leadership	Correlation Coefficient	0.090	-0.008	0.387[**]	1.000	-0.076	-0.009
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Government Policy	Correlation Coefficient	-0.243[*]	-0.119	-0.128	-0.076	1.000	0.103
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
	Employee Know how	Correlation Coefficient	0.348[**]	0.294[**]	-0.045	-0.009	0.103	1.000
		N	72	72	72	72	72	72
*.Significance level 0.05								

Source: (Survey data, 2011)

The study revealed that there was sufficient evidence that there is weak statistical relationship between two independent variables that is employee motivation and top school leadership with formulation of school strategic plans at 0.05 significance level. The Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r) between the dependent variable and the two independent variables were 0.145 and 0.09 respectively. Therefore the hypotheses that Top

school leadership has relationship with formulation of school strategic plans and that employee motivation has relationship with formulation of school strategic plans were found to have a weak statistical relationship. This could be attributed to the fact that organization planning is also influenced more by other factors such as organizational culture.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the study was to analyse the factors that influence formulation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Embu North district, Embu County, Kenya. Review of the literature provided a strong evidence of relationship between the study variables. Empirical review showed that in order for a school to formulate strategic plan the management should put in place measures to solicit for the required funds, understand the various government policies with regard to strategic plan formulation and train employees to provide them with required skills.

It can be concluded that availability of funds, government policy and employee know how significantly influence formulation of school strategic plan in secondary schools in Embu North district. Therefore the researcher recommends that, the Ministry of Education should carry out aggressive awareness programmes to sensitise key school stakeholders on the importance of preparing and implementing school strategic plans effectively and provide clear guidelines on what should be included in school strategic plans, consider organizing joint training for a block of schools to educate the school stakeholders on the process of school strategic plans in order to solve the problem of financial constrains faced by many secondary schools.

Finally the study also recommends that future studies should be directed towards investigating the effect of organizational culture on formulation of school strategic plans in secondary schools, effect of awareness programmes carried out by Ministry of Education officials on formulation of strategic plans and finally factors influencing formulation of strategic plans in public primary schools in Embu North district.

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