

INFLUENCE OF COMMITMENT OF TOP MANAGEMENT ON PERFORMANCE OF MERU NATIONAL POLYTECHNIC KENYA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of commitment of top management affect performance of Meru National polytechnic. The study was anchored under dynamic capabilities theories, strategic theory and contingency theory. A descriptive study technique was used, with a target audience of 107 respondents drawn from top, middle and lower management levels in Meru National Polytechnic. The population was divided into three separate strata, each of which consisted of a large number of highly trained top managers of Meru National Polytechnics who worked together as a team. The researcher used census to include all the respondents in the study. In order to gather information, respondents were asked to complete self-administered questionnaires. A regression analysis was performed in order to determine whether or not there was a link between the research variables. The software version 22 of the SPSS statistical package was used. The study found that strategic implementation and overall performance of Meru National Polytechnic in Kenya heavily rely on top management commitment. Senior management's unwavering dedication serves as a central anchor, providing leadership, motivation, and support to subordinates. Recommendations from research findings point to the organizational framework as a major obstacle to operational effectiveness. To address this, it is suggested that the institution establish local extensions and appoint representatives for marketing and compliance. It is crucial for management to support staff training and clearly define roles to effectively implement strategies.

Keywords: *Commitment of Top Management, Performance, Meru National Polytechnic*

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the twentieth century, strategic management has increased in prominence. Organizations have concentrated their efforts on long-term planning throughout this period. Managers and business owners should have a strategy that incorporates contingency planning as well as other elements (Fitzroy & Hulbert, 2012). Environmental scanning should be carried out for strategic reasons by evaluating and sending information to the appropriate people. This aids in the analysis of the external and internal environments, which is then followed by an assessment process, which should be carried out on a regular basis, with an ongoing attempt to enhance the environment. The development of strategy is the third phase in the process, and it is

at this point that the organization determines the most effective course of action for accomplishing its goals. Being acquainted with the organization's strategic position, selecting a plan for the future, and putting the strategy into action are all examples of strategic management techniques. It is the phrase strategic management that emphasizes the significance of managers in terms of directing strategy. It has been seen via experience that tactics are not created by chance. Strategies include the use of human resources in an organization to make decisions, devise strategies, and put them into action (Johnson *et al*, 2010).

The working conditions and innovations that managers utilize in the workplace in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their organizations are defined by Akong'o (2010) as management practices. Management practices, according to Juma and Okibo (2016), are the abilities, traits, and competences that managers possess that enable them to get things done efficiently via the use of other people in the organization. Implementing superior management practices helps vocational training institutions perform better, which helps them survive and thrive while maintaining their competitive edge over the long term (Omerzel & Antoncic, 2008). It is essential for firms to adhere to specified management practices in order to be able to examine their strategic position and find feasible options for the execution of future strategic plans. It is necessary to continue to use optimal management practices in order to improve the performance of the company (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008). In order for strategic management techniques to be successful, it is necessary to have appropriate resources and competencies.

Muogbo (2013) delineates strategic management as a concept revolving around decision-making and the initiation of corrective actions aimed at realizing an organization's long-term objectives. This involves formulating and enforcing plans specifically crafted to meet the company's goals, as outlined by Pearce & Robinson (2007). Strategic management encompasses several aspects: strategy formulation, implementation, and thereafter its evaluation and control. Fundamental to strategy implementation across all organizations are activities such as setting annual objectives, policy creation, and resource allocation. Additionally, contingent on an organization's size and nature, other management issues may also be pivotal in ensuring the strategy is successfully implemented (Pearce & Robinson, 2011). Lamb (2009) intimates that a synergy of factors, including resource allocation, organizational culture, structural considerations, proficient leadership, change management, and communication, have been demonstrated to possess a positive correlation with a company's performance in the preceding year. Expanding upon this, Simba et al. (2018) delved into the realm of strategic management against the canvas of Kenya's industrial fish processors, exploring drivers and varied factors like strategic planning practice, technical competitiveness, market rivalry, and corporate policies, and further dissecting variables such as customer relationship management (CRM), strategic competitive positioning (SCP), and organizational structure.

TVET reforms in Kenya find their foundation in Sessional Paper No. 14 of 2012, which establishes a policy scaffold for educational alterations within the country. This structural guide assists in forming the requisite expertise, proficiencies, and mindsets needed to realize the objectives outlined in Vision 2030. Furthermore, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act, enacted in 2013, ushered in a wave of modifications within TVET, contributing to the emergence and growth of new institutions. In tandem with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), the Curriculum Development Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC) was instituted as a regulatory entity. It shoulders the duty of orchestrating curriculum development, executing assessments, and certifying programs within its

jurisdiction. The Meru National Polytechnic (MNP) is situated in Meru County along the Meru-Nanyuki highway, about 10 kilometers from Meru Town and less than five kilometers from Makutano Centre. It is a public institution of higher learning. The Meru National Polytechnic, formerly known as the Meru Technical Training Institute, has been in existence since 1956, when the Meru County Council established it to teach the young in a variety of practical skills. In 2016, the institution received an upgrade from its previous designation. Gitoro Technical was the company's previous name. The school was transferred to the regional education office in 1964, and it was renamed Meru Technical School, which offered two-year courses. Graduation rate, awards, student attendance rate, research growth, and department and staff retention are some of the most often used measures to evaluate institutional success in the education sector (World bank group, 2015). The impact of strategic management techniques on performance at Meru National Polytechnic will be investigated using a questionnaire and an interview guide, according to the study.

Problem of the statement

Performance evaluation is critical for businesses because it helps them to make continuous changes while also determining whether or not they are meeting their objectives and achieving their goals (Nzuve & Nyaega, 2013). The competitive advantage of a business is obtained from strategic management techniques such as the dedication of senior management, the allocation of resources, the use of effective communication, and the adoption of technological innovations. These methods, among others, help a company to outperform its rivals in the market and achieve more profitability (Porter, 2008). People in business who want to stay ahead of the competition now and in the future are starting to see the value in moving away from traditional reactive customer engagement services and toward a proactive approach that takes into account the increasing user-centricity of modern consumer communication networks.

Meru National Polytechnic, one of the recently refaced TVET institutes that has been upgraded to the rank of National polytechnic, has observed a rise in the number of students enrolled. Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service, which provides students placement services, has been credited with this success (KUCCPS). In order to satisfy the growing demand, the government and the institution must collaborate in order to provide resources and deploy information and communications technology (ICT). It is vital to determine the optimal capacity and quality that will be available in order to meet the institution's short- and long-term requirements, respectively. Other technical and vocational education and training institutions are also seeking to enhance their performance; as a consequence, the environment in which firms operate is dynamic and chaotic, with frequent and quick changes that often render techniques from past years outdated (Ofunya, 2013). When the first reported case of covid – 19 was discovered in Kenya in 2020, the Kenyan government proclaimed the closure of all educational institutions indefinitely, thereby putting a stop to face-to-face learning for the country's students. After launching online learning for students in September 2020, Meru National Polytechnic students will be able to access virtual learning opportunities starting in September 2020. Through the use of the internet, instructors were able to adequately evaluate students as recently as May 2021. As a consequence of the advent of information and communication technologies (ICT) and their integration with learning, the performance of educational institutions has greatly increased. However, none of these studies focused on the influence of strategic management practices on the performance of national polytechnics in Kenya, specifically Meru National Polytechnic. As a result, the purpose of this research is to determine the impact of strategic management methods on performance at Meru National Polytechnic.

Theoretical Literature Review

Professor John Adair developed a leadership model which emphasizes the importance of individuals and the team in implementing tasks, offering a nuanced perspective that integrates task-oriented and people-oriented leadership approaches (Adair, 1983). Concurrently, contingency theory, which is rooted in the works of Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), suggests that the optimal management style and organizational structure are contingent upon the various external environmental factors in which an organization operates. This is further elaborated by Dess and Beard (1984), who highlight environmental dynamism as a critical aspect to consider, as it relates to the rate and predictability of change within the operating environment of an organization. Moreover, when considering strategic market positioning and competition, Porter's five forces model becomes invaluable. Porter (1980) articulated that the competitiveness and risks within an industry could be analyzed through five forces: threats of new entrants, rivalry among existing competitors, bargaining power of buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, and the threat of substitute products or services. This model not only helps organizations identify the forces affecting their operation but also informs strategic planning, wherein leaders must navigate these forces to maintain and enhance their competitive position. Extending the discussion to leadership's role in managing various aspects, Koontz and Weihrich (2006) accentuated the significance of the power exerted by a leader in determining the organization's effectiveness. In parallel, Fiedler's contingency model of leadership (Fiedler, 1967) affirms that leaders can be either task-oriented or relationship-oriented and that their effectiveness is contextual and dependent on the match between their orientation and the degree to which the situation gives control and influence to the leader. In the realm of environmental dynamism and market changes, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) distinguished between moderately dynamic markets, where changes are fairly regular and predictable, and high-velocity markets, where changes are nonlinear and less predictable. In situations where markets are dynamically unpredictable and rapidly evolving, strategic flexibility and adaptability become crucial for organizational survival and prosperity. In an organizational context, leadership goes beyond a single-faceted approach. While some universality in principles might be envisioned, it is pivotal to recognize the complexity and variability in applying these principles across different organizations and contexts. Hence, in a polytechnic context where management is responsible for numerous tasks such as establishing performance standards, planning, and resource allocation, leadership becomes integral. It is not just about enforcing rules or managing tasks but also about motivating, communicating, and creating robust departments to achieve group tasks and objectives (Adair, 1983). Strategic leadership thus involves a blend of innovative, task-oriented, and people-oriented approaches to navigate through the varied and dynamic environments organizations operate within. It is paramount that research and practical applications in strategic planning and leadership consider the myriad of theories and models available, contextualizing them to the specificities and dynamisms of the environment in which they are applied. Consequently, blending leadership with innovation and creativity becomes pivotal in crafting and executing strategic plans, aiming to elevate overall organizational performance through a well-rounded, contextually relevant approach.

Empirical Literature Review

Gitau (2015) conducted a research at Kenyatta University on the adoption of strategic management methods, which was published in 2015. A descriptive survey method was used in this research study to gather information. This particular research discovered that it was critical to provide timely information regarding organizational advances to all levels of the company,

both during and after a period of organizational transition. Researchers found that a company's strategic management practices were affected by a variety of elements, including a company's workers' and customers' lack of grasp of the strategy, as well as issues and impediments that weren't acknowledged, recognized, or handled. Meru National Polytechnic will host this research, which will target a different demographic than the last one. The commitment of upper management, budget allocation, employee empowerment, and technology adoption will all be highlighted. Top management, encompassing the CEO, owners, and senior-level managers, plays a pivotal role in shaping organizational strategies and outcomes, largely due to the decision-making processes that are deeply rooted in their collective and individual experiences and values. A synergy of their cognition, derived from shared experiences and values, can significantly influence the organizational culture and strategic direction, thus affecting organizational outcomes and business success.

Smith and Kofron (2009) underscored the paramount significance of senior-level managers, asserting that their interactions and participative management approaches foster enhanced alignment with and commitment to the organizational objectives. A cohesive top management team, which consciously harmonizes their personal and collective experiences, values, and strategies, can profoundly enhance the alignment and commitment of the entire organization towards its strategic goals and objectives. Furthermore, Mukhalasie (2014) affirms the notion that the collective decision-making and interaction processes within the senior management team can indeed strengthen their dedication towards the firm's objectives and goals, especially when significant judgments pertaining to pivotal themes are effectively discussed and aligned.

A research conducted by Wachira (2009) explored the challenges faced by the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) and scrutinized the role of top management in navigating through these challenges towards the realization of its mission. The research highlighted that one of the core challenges was insufficient funding for needy students and underscored that strategic management, particularly at the top level, is essential in devising robust strategies to lobby for additional funds and mitigate such challenges. Hence, top management, in this context, is instrumental in identifying, strategizing, and overcoming organizational challenges, asserting their critical role in ensuring that organizational missions are not impeded by identifiable and solvable hurdles.

Sterling (2013) points out that the success of strategy implementation can often be inhibited by a lack of buy-in from those responsible for its execution, which is a crucial aspect that top management must navigate. In addition, Cater and Pucko (2010) indicate that human capital, talent management, and adept leadership are fundamental to ensuring that well-crafted plans are effectively brought into action. Thus, the top management's role goes beyond strategic formulation and extends into ensuring that strategies are cohesively implemented, which involves ensuring that mid and lower-level managers and other organizational members are adequately aligned, committed, and capacitated to bring strategic plans to fruition.

In a nutshell, while top management significantly influences organizational direction and outcomes, the integration of their collective experiences, values, and strategies forms a cohesive strategic leadership approach that permeates through the organizational structure, influencing overall performance and the successful realization of strategic objectives. This elucidates that leadership, particularly at the top, is not merely positional but permeates through the structural, cultural, and strategic fabrics of the organization, thereby playing a quintessential role in navigating through challenges, fostering alignment and commitment, and ensuring the effective realization of organizational strategies and objectives.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design for the objectives of this study. The research was carried out at Meru National Polytechnic, which is located in Imenti North sub County along the Meru-Nanyuki route, about 10 kilometers from Meru Town and less than five kilometers from Makutano Centre. The participants in this research included 107 employees of the Meru National Polytechnic's drawn from steering committee, management committee and departmental committee top management, middle management, and lower management levels. This study adopted a census sampling for every member who was included in the study. The information was gathered via the use of a questionnaire that was created by the researcher. The primary data was gathered from the personnel of MNP via the distribution of a questionnaire by the researcher, who was aided by research assistants. Statistical analysis was carried out using the SPSS software for both inferential and descriptive data analyses. When presenting descriptive statistics, percentages and frequencies were used, while inferential statistics were evaluated using correlations and regression.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Response Rate

A total of 107 questionnaires were distributed to participants, with 95 completed ones being retrieved, resulting in an 88.8% response rate. Twelve participants were inaccessible due to demanding schedules and consistent meetings, and attempts to connect with them through established contacts were unfruitful.

Descriptive Statistics

Commitment of Top Management and Performance of Meru National Polytechnic

The research aimed to explore the impact of top management's dedication on the performance at Meru National Polytechnic. A five-point Likert scale was utilized, with the following interpretations: 5.000-4.100 signified strong agreement; 4.000-3.100 indicated agreement; 3.000-2.100 was neutral; 2.000-1.100 represented disagreement; and 1.000-0.000 conveyed strong disagreement.

Table 1: Commitment of Top Management and Performance

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Commitment of top level management to strategy implementation practices is very important	95	4.0385	1.04715
Top level management must demonstrate willingness to own organisation's strategies	95	4.1923	0.99091
Lower rank employees lack support and encouragement if top management lack commitment in performing their responsibilities	95	4.0769	1.06359
Top management should not spare more effort to persuade the employees to get into their ideas for strategy implementation practices to be effective	95	2.9038	1.49849
Lack of adequate backing of the strategies by top management inhibit strategy implementation	95	4.2692	1.01199
Valid N (listwise)	95		

Source: Researcher (2023)

The insights derived from Table 1 reveal unanimous perspectives from participants on several pivotal aspects. Firstly, unanimity prevails in acknowledging the crucial role of the commitment from top management in executing strategic practices, as evidenced by a mean value of 4.0385

and a standard deviation of 1.04715. Additionally, a robust agreement exists asserting that the visible dedication of top management to organizational strategies is imperative, reflected by a mean of 4.1923 and a standard deviation of 0.99091.

Moreover, participants concurred that when top management does not display earnest dedication in fulfilling their roles, subordinate employees might encounter a deficiency in necessary support and motivation. This viewpoint is quantified by a mean and standard deviation of 4.0769 and 1.06359, respectively. Conversely, a more neutral position was adopted by respondents concerning the proposition that top management should exert additional effort to convince employees to adopt their strategic implementation ideas, indicated by a mean of 2.9038 and a standard deviation of 1.40849.

Concluding, respondents strongly agreed that insufficient support from top management obstructs effective strategy execution, as demonstrated by a mean score of 4.2692 and a standard deviation of 1.01199. These outcomes accentuate the essentiality of top-level management commitment to proficient strategy implementation within the organizational context. In essence, the allegiance of top-level management to strategy implementation practices emerges as a pivotal component for organizational triumph.

Performance of Meru National Polytechnic

Participants were prompted to evaluate the performance of Meru National Polytechnic in Kenya, utilizing a five-point Likert scale for their responses. The scale was delineated as follows: 5.000-4.100 signified a strong agreement; a score between 4.000 and 3.100 indicated agreement; a neutral stance was represented by scores ranging from 3.000-2.100; disagreement was denoted by 2.000-1.100, and strong disagreement was marked by a score between 1.000 and 0.000.

Table 2: Performance of Meru National Polytechnic

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Performance of Meru national polytechnic in Kenya has increased over period of time	95	4.4038	0.66449
Prudent resource allocation has a positive effect to performance of Meru national polytechnic	95	4.3269	0.61743
Performance of Meru national polytechnic is measured by the amount of fund disbursement to students	95	3.5577	1.05558
Strategic staffing has an effect on the performance of Meru national polytechnic	95	4.4423	0.53919

Source: Researcher (2023)

Data detailed in Table 2 reveals a substantial agreement among respondents that the performance trajectory of Meru National Polytechnic in Kenya has been positively ascending, as evidenced by a mean of 4.4038 and a standard deviation of 0.66449. Moreover, there's robust agreement among participants regarding the positive impact of wise resource distribution on the performance of the institution, validated by a mean of 4.3269 and a standard deviation of 0.61743.

Similarly, participants concur that there is a tangible link between the performance of Meru National Polytechnic and the financial support provided to students, which is underlined by a mean value of 3.5577 and a standard deviation of 1.05558. Additionally, there is a strong alignment among respondents on the pivotal role of strategic staffing in elevating the institution's performance, signified by a mean of 4.4423 and a standard deviation of 0.53919. In

encapsulation, the data underscores the critical influence of financial availability in the strategy execution of the institution.

Inferential Statistics

Analytical examination was performed to produce outcomes related to correlation, evaluate the model's adequacy, and analyze both variance and regression coefficients.

Table 3: Summary Model

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1		.726 ^a	0.701	0.746	1.160	
a. Predictors: (Constant), commitment of top management						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	37.245	1.000	37.245	27.691	.000 ^b
	Residual	126.430	94.000	1.345		
	Total	163.675	95.000			
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.417	1.005		4.483	0.017
	Top management commitment	0.737	0.129	0.002	0.014	0.006

The performance of Meru National Polytechnic was satisfactorily elucidated by variable; top management commitment. This was affirmed by an R square value - the coefficient of determination - of 70.1%, indicating that the independent variable account for 70.1% of the fluctuations in the dependent variable, which in this instance was the institution's performance. Consequently, the model utilized to connect the variables' relationship was deemed satisfactory. The findings revealed the overall model to be of statistical significance. Moreover, the independent variables were inferred to be effective predictors of performance. An F statistic of 27.691 and a reported p-value of 0.000, which is below the conventional 0.05 significance level, supported this implication.

From the table 3 above the coefficients of the regression are used to come up with the following regression equation:

$$Y = 0.417 + 0.737 x$$

The research ascertained that, when keeping all factors constant at zero, the performance level of Meru National Polytechnic is 0.417. Furthermore, the data illustrates that, with all other independent variables held at zero, a one-unit increment in top management commitment would trigger a 0.737 enhancement in the performance of Meru National Polytechnic. The significance levels for the constant, top management commitment are 0.017 and 0.006 respectively. As values are under 0.05, it signifies that the independent variable is vital in swaying the performance of Meru National Polytechnic.

Discussions of findings

Participants unanimously agree that strong top-level management dedication is crucial for effective strategy execution and that a lack thereof can hinder support and motivation for employees, ultimately affecting organizational performance. In related research by Kandie et al. (2015), it was discerned that the implementation of strategy is shaped by content-related factors, which encompass stakeholder participation in devising strategy and the strategic plan's caliber.

Concurrently, context-specific factors such as organizational architecture, culture, learning capabilities, strategic leadership, and harmonization with market variables are instrumental. The enactment process incorporates aspects like operational planning, monitoring progress, and collaboration, resource allocation, aligning personnel with strategy, efficient communication, strategic and managerial control systems, and deploying information resources effectively.

In a parallel vein, Mwangi (2014) underscored the significant impact of organizational architecture, culture, availability of resources, top management commitment, and communication on the execution of strategy. O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) delineate the concept of ambidextrous organizations that effectively manage and balance both explorative and exploitative strategies. They articulate that the commitment of top management in aligning resources, strategically shaping organizational culture, and fostering a supportive environment for innovative endeavors significantly enhances an organization's performance. The example of IBM in their study demonstrates how effective leadership and strategic alignment of resources facilitated a successful transition from a hardware-focused business model to a more service-oriented one.

Kaplan and Norton (2008) emphasize the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach as a pivotal tool for top management to align organizational activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, improving internal and external communications, and monitoring organizational performance against strategic goals. A case study regarding Banco Itaú (Brazil's second-largest bank) was highlighted, wherein the BSC was instrumental in cascading strategy and creating an alignment among various organizational units, thereby bolstering its overall performance and market position. Mintzberg (1994) offers a divergent view, suggesting that strategy formulation and implementation should not always be distinct phases in a sequential process. His critique points towards the pitfalls of overemphasizing structured strategic planning, underscoring that real-world strategies often emerge from an adaptive process shaped by management's incremental decision-making rather than being meticulously planned. The strategy formation at Honda, for instance, was often emergent rather than deliberate, suggesting that serendipity and spontaneous strategic shifts, which contradicted initial plans, were crucial to its success in the US motorcycle market.

Christensen (1997) in his seminal work, "The Innovator's Dilemma," highlights instances where top-management commitment to prevailing strategies and resource-allocation processes could inadvertently stifle innovation, particularly disruptive innovation. For example, despite having the capabilities to innovate in the digital photographic space, Kodak's adherence to its established strategies and resource allocation norms contributed significantly to its failure to adapt to the shifting technological landscape. These varied research perspectives illustrate that while there is substantial alignment among several researchers about the pivotal role of top management commitment and strategic alignment in influencing organizational performance, others highlight nuanced, sometimes contradictory aspects. These disparities suggest that the efficacy of management commitment and strategic alignment might be contingent upon organizational context, industry dynamics, and the nature of strategic initiatives undertaken. Consequently, integrating these varied insights can pave the way for a more holistic understanding of strategic management and implementation practices within organizations.

Conclusions

Meru National Polytechnic in Kenya has its strategic implementation and overall performance predominantly steered by top management commitment. Firstly, the absolute commitment from senior management forms a pivotal anchor, offering not just leadership but also acting as a

motivational and support pillar for subordinates. The importance of this factor lies in providing direction, establishing a clear vision, and ensuring that the necessary resources are allocated for strategy implementation.

Recommendations

Research conclusions highlight the organizational framework as the pivotal obstacle to operational effectiveness. Thus, leadership must pursue a durable alternative for an enduring period. It is suggested that Meru National Polytechnic inaugurates functioning local extensions and designates representatives for marketing and compliance in each county to ease recovery processes and resolve inquiries. The treasury ought to sanction extra funding in response to the escalating demand for loans pertaining to technical and vocational education training. This adaptation is vital to accommodate an expanding beneficiary population requiring elevated loan sums to cover prevailing living costs. It's crucial that Meru National Polytechnic's management optimizes internal resource distribution. Additionally, implementing transparent communication avenues and disseminating information about other financial aid programs, such as Afya Elimu, is essential. To aptly enact strategies, upper management must exhibit support, assure staff training, and define roles clearly.

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