

INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION ON STAKEHOLDERS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN GARISSA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

While the benefits of effective strategic implementation in government cannot be disputed, there are several concerns about its success as well as the strategies to be adopted in implementation of strategic plans in various levels of government. The main objective of the study was to assess the influence of communication on stakeholders' strategy implementation in Garissa County, Kenya. This study was based on contingency theory, institutional theory, resource based view and competitive advantage theory. This study applied a descriptive design. The target population of this study was 403 employees in Garissa County Government. This study employed stratified sampling where each group in the population was included in the sample. A sample of 201 respondents was selected. This study utilized questionnaire as the data collection instrument. A pilot test was conducted where 10 respondents from Garissa County Government were issued with the draft questionnaire and were asked to fill and give their recommendations on the completeness of the questionnaire. In questionnaire administration, drop and pick later method was applied. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis. Descriptive statistics that were utilized included percentages mean scores and frequency distributions. Inferential statistics that will be utilized include regression and correlation analysis. Presentation of results for both the descriptive and inferential statistics was through tables, pie-charts and graphs. The findings indicated that communication to stakeholders did not significantly influence strategy implementation and recommended that Garissa County government should plan for communication and public relations and have a budget for that.

Keywords: Communication skills, Strategy Implementation, and Stakeholders' Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

A government is a huge and complex organization, whose operations and strategic focus could be greatly enhanced by the well-focused application of strategic plans to support improvements in productivity, management effectiveness and ultimately, the quality of services offered to citizens (Omboi & Mucai, 2011). While the benefits of effective strategic implementation in government cannot be disputed, there are several concerns about its success as well as the strategies to be adopted in implementation of strategic plans in various countries. Strategic plan is a document that details a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. Strategic planning follows a series of steps, including mission, objectives, external analysis, internal analysis, and development of alternatives, strategy selection, implementation, and control of the strategy (Gebhardt & Eagles, 2014). It has specific steps that can be taken immediately to produce desirable outcomes. Strategic planning occurs in many government and corporate organizations, including the military, county governments, local authorities, manufacturing companies, and environmental agencies. However, there are practices that are critical to the successful implementation of a strategic plan which if not present or when they are not practiced properly, this can lead to the outcomes that were envisaged not to be realized.

The body of knowledge on the factors hindering strategic plan implementation is rich with surveys and industry based studies. Factors that affect strategy implementation can be categorized as leadership, information availability and accuracy, uncertainty, organizational structure, organizational culture, human resources, financial resources and technology. Although most authors agree that these factors affect strategy implementation, each factor's impact is at a different level and carries a different force. Rajasekar (2014) stated that human resources are becoming the key focus of strategy implementation and reiterated that people, not financial resources, are the key strategic resources in strategy implementation. However, Cater and Pucko (2010) demonstrated that managers mostly rely on planning and organizing activities when implementing strategies, while the biggest obstacle to strategy implementation and execution is poor leadership. Their results showed that adapting the organizational structure to serve the execution of strategy has a positive influence on performance and service delivery.

However, too much consideration of various aspects of strategic plan implementation might result in formulating a strategy that is not competitive and, therefore, implementing it would be a waste of time and resources. Echoing previous studies with similar results, Zaribaf and Bayrami (2010) found that most executives in government spend a great deal of time, energy, and money in formulating a strategy, but do not provide sufficient resources and input to implement it properly. Therefore, one must strike a balance between an innovative and workable strategy and its successful implementation. The current study will focus on Garissa County. Garissa County is one of the three counties in the North Eastern region of Kenya. It covers an area of 44,417,510 hectares and lies between latitude 10 58'N and 20 1' S and longitude 380 34'E and 410 32'E. The county borders the Republic of Somalia to the East, Lamu County to the South, Tana River County to the West, Isiolo County to the North West and Wajir County to the North (Garissa County Integrated Development Plan, (2015).

2. Statement of the Problem

The survival and growth of organizations will certainly depend on their ability to conceive competitive strategies and their eventual implementation. All organizations resist change and try to maintain the status quo, sometimes even if it yields unsatisfactory results (Schoemaker & Krupp, 2015). To translate planned intervention activities into actions that bring desired organizational outcomes requires incorporating numerous variables: individual behaviour, social factors, organizational arrangements, physical settings, and technology. In government, implementation of strategic plans is complex as the government is a complex organization that is not vastly informed by profit but by provision of services to the people. A government follows an equitable and social policy where its major motivation is to serve its people effectively and equitably. Successful strategy implementation is a key for any organization's survival (Speculand, 2012). Many organizations could not sustain their competitive advantages, despite having a robust strategy formulation process, because they lack the effectiveness in implementing the strategies. Considering the higher failure rates in implementation of strategies, more attention should be given by executives to implementing the strategy. Several reasons are frequently offered for the failure of implementing strategy.

While this field of research attracted significant research interests and subsequently added quality theories and models in the western world, this topic has not attracted much attention in the Kenyan context and more so in the northern part of Kenya where this study focuses on (Ringquist, 2011). In government, only 50 percent of strategic plans are implemented successfully (Allio, 2015). Governments whether central, county or local have instituted new public management practices where they follow the practices that are in private organizations including strategic planning. However, strategic planning in government is complex as it faces more decision areas and challenges than strategic planning in a private organization (Speculand, 2012). Various studies have focused on strategy implementation in private organizations whereas few studies focus on strategy implementation in public organizations. In Garissa County, Nyamboga (2015) noted that most of the programs that had been indicated in the inaugural strategic plan of the county had not even commenced almost halfway through. It is because of the above problem that the current study sought to assess the influence of communication on stakeholders' strategy implementation in Garissa County, Kenya.

3. Literature Review Omondi, Ombui and Mungatu (2013) conducted a study with the purpose of finding out the determinants of strategy implementation by the international reproductive health (RH) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kenya for attainment of MDG 5 by 2015. The objectives of the study were to analyze the determinants of strategy implementation for attainment of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5 by international RH NGOs operating in Kenya. The study established that there is a significant statistical association between communication of the strategy to the implementers and stakeholders and ability to implement with about 55 per cent of the respondents agreeing that communication affects strategy implementation. This contrasts with study done by Mucai and Messah (2010) which concluded that communication of the strategy influences implementation of strategic management plans through the preference of institutional leadership and Board of Governors. This is because institutional policies in international RH NGOs are largely determined by the donors with limited flexibility on expenditure. This compares favourably with the research findings that depicted about 63 per cent of the respondents who agreed that demands of stakeholders such as donors, community influences strategy implementation in the surveyed organizations.

Omondi et al. (2013) established a significant association between those respondents who felt there is improved RH policies and those who felt the strategy implementation was on track with about 94 per cent of the respondents interviewed agreeing that there are improved RH policies and strategies to expand RH programmes. This contrasts with research findings from Mucai and Messah (2010) which indicated that there was evidence that the low influence of policy statements on decision making is an indicator to the relative weakness of correlation between implementation of strategies and communication of the policies to stakeholders. A study by Allio (2015) sought to establish how communication influences implementing of strategy. The study established that many managers opt to create their own summaries of programs, in formats they invent or import (often reflecting their comfort level with a particular software program, or preexisting data).

The study noted that insisting on a common implementation format does wonders to streamline communication and pinpoint emerging issues. It makes communicating within the team or unit easier, and also greatly enhances comparison or collaboration with other teams, and with senior management or the board. A consistent set of templates and exhibits also enhances adaptability: the strategy managers can present programs side by side, and make systemic changes in emphasis without losing time translating or transposing conflicting documents. Allio (2015) also noted that simplicity and congruence are virtues, but they have their limits: often, a team will deploy a series of backup worksheets, or use different, more detailed tools like GANNT or PERT charts to back-up their work. It would be foolhardy to simplify at the expense of critical content: these should not be eliminated or suppressed, rather, they should serve as part of a cascading level of detail, available as needed, but packaged so that key, summary information is funneled to the top. At the highest level, simple, single-page templates serve as the common script for monitoring performance. The study concluded that communication is a key factor that influences strategy implementation.

4. Research Methodology

This study applied a descriptive design. According to Thomas (2011), A descriptive design is the one where data or information is collected about some given units or observations without influencing the environment in any way. This study is also referred to as observational since it just reports about the variable of interest in its naturally occurring environment without changing it in any way. The target population of this study was employees in Garissa County Government. The total population was 403. This study employed stratified sampling where each group in the population was included in the sample. The current study utilized questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Descriptive statistics that were utilized included percentages mean scores and frequency distributions. Inferential statistics that were utilized included regression and correlation analysis. Regression analysis was used test association between strategy implementation and public participation, communication, allocation of human resources and monitoring and evaluation. Correlation analysis was used to compute correlation coefficients (r) which were used to assess the relationship between the study variables which included the direction of the relationship and the strength of that relationship. Presentation of results for both the descriptive and inferential statistics was through tables.

5. Findings

Respondents were requested to indicate the level of agreement to listed statements on how the county government communicates to stakeholders. The rating scale was on a scale of 1 – 5 (1- Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree and 5 - Strongly agree) responses were analysed through mean scores and presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Communication to Stakeholders

| Statement | MS |
|---|------|
| The county government ensures that the strategy is well communicated to stakeholders including national government, suppliers and the public | 2.14 |
| The strategy and the implementation process is published by the county where it can be easily assessed by stakeholders | 2.31 |
| The county government ensures that each stakeholder understands the strategy properly to ensure buy-in | 2.67 |
| The county government ensures that each stakeholder get communication on the strategy in a form and language the stakeholder understands properly | 2.33 |
| The communication by the county government on the strategy and its success in implementation is communicated timely to all stakeholders | 2.27 |

Results as presented in Table 1 indicate that the respondents disagreed to the statement that the county government ensures that the strategy is well communicated to stakeholders including national government, suppliers and the public (MS = 2.14). Results also indicated that respondents disagreed to the statement that the strategy and the implementation process is published by the county where it can be easily assessed by stakeholders (MS = 2.31). Respondents were however, neutral to the statement the county government ensures that each stakeholder understands the strategy properly to ensure buy-in (MS = 2.67). Further, respondents disagreed to the statement that the county government ensures that each stakeholder get communication on the strategy in a form and language the stakeholder understands properly (MS = 2.33). Respondents also disagreed to the statement that the communication by the county government on the strategy and its success in implementation is communicated timely to all stakeholders (MS = 2.27). The results for the current study indicated that stakeholder communication had no significant relationship with strategy implementation implying that improvement in stakeholder communication is not expected to significantly affect strategy implementation. Further results indicate that communication to stakeholders was a significant and negative predictor of strategy implementation ($\beta = -0.235$; $t = -3.806$; $p < 0.05$). This indicates that a unit improvement in the rating for communication to stakeholders would result into a 0.235 reduction in the rating for strategy implementation. This indicates that improvement in communication to stakeholder would result into a reduced effectiveness in strategy implementation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Results indicate that the county government does not communicate the strategy to stakeholders well. The county neither publishes the strategy and the implementation process nor does it communicate the strategy timely to stakeholders. Stakeholder communication had a negative but insignificant relationship with strategy implementation ($r = -0.063$; $p > 0.05$). Similarly, communication to stakeholders was a significant and negative predictor of strategy implementation ($\beta = -0.235$; $t = -3.806$; $p < 0.05$). Communication had a negative but insignificant relationship with strategy implementation. However, communication to stakeholders was a significant and negative influencer of strategy implementation. This was because Garissa County does not communicate the strategy to stakeholders well. The county neither publishes the strategy and the implementation process nor does it communicate the strategy timely to stakeholders. This poor communication has made communication to stakeholder to have the unintended effect on strategy implementation. Different stakeholders have different interests, attitudes and priorities. Effective communication ensures that they receive information that is relevant to their needs and builds positive attitudes to the county government. Garissa County government should therefore plan for communication and public relations and have a budget for that. This arm should be tasked with communicating the plans and strides made by the county. This is expected to increase support for the county.

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