INFLUENCE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT ON PERFORMANCE OF CHURCH OWNED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Strategy implementation is a key component of the strategic management process. There is a lot more effort and resources invested by organizations in the formulation process than the implementation and control of strategy. There are high failures rates reported which are attributable to failure in the strategy implementation. This study sought to establish the influence of senior management commitment on performance of church owned primary schools in Kiambu County. The study was anchored on two theories, the agency theory, and resource-based view theory. The study used a descriptive design. The study targeted 1 principal, 1 deputy principal and 1 church leader from all the 64 church-based primary schools operating within the county. The target population was therefore 192 respondents. The study used census method since the population was small. The researcher contracted research assistants to help in data collection using structured questionnaire that was tested to ensure it gave valid and reliable responses. The collected data was sorted and entered in SPSS and descriptive analysis and inferential statistics were conducted and the findings were presented in tables, charts and in discussions. The study established that senior management team empowered their employees in improving their performance and that their senior management team was committed in training and rewarding our employees for their service delivery. Based on the findings, the study concludes that senior management support has significant effect on performance of church owned institutions. Therefore, the study recommends that the senior management team of all church owned schools in Kenya should increase their commitment on implementation of the formulated strategies so as to enhance performance of their organizations.

Key Words: *senior management commitment, performance, church owned primary schools, Kiambu County, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Performance is important to any organization as it is the determinant that an organization will be able to conduct all its activities using the resources at its disposal. Performance is a measure of the real output against the set objectives and if the results are as per or above the objectives, then the organization or firm is said to have received high performance rates. The performance of any organization can be measured in two ways either as a financial term or non-financial terms (Abass, Munga & Were, 2017). The financial terms include profit margins, return on asset and return on equity; while the non-financial terms as sector specific and cover aspects that include effective service provision, completion of projects within budgets and in the stipulated timelines, quality of products, efficient resource utilization and value addition of products. In the schools, high performance can be measured in terms of transition rates from one grade to another/ or one level to another; high academic achievement of the learners and high outcomes in terms of positively impacting the society.

Strategy implementation involves the act of putting plans, programs and policies into a systematic working format in an effort to realise the set objectives, meet market demands and succeed in the highly competitive market places (Pak & Kim, 2018). Implementing strategies requires commitment of the leadership within the organization, having a competent working force that can work hard and work together to realise the dream of the owners and it also requires the owners and stakeholders to avail necessary resources as inputs for the entire production process. It is also important that sound channels of communication are developed that allow every person to be involved in actualization of the formulated strategies (Kinyanjui, 2018).

Globally and in Canada, Elbanna, Andrews and Pollanen (2016) the set strategy cannot effectively be implemented unless there is consistency between the strategy and each organization dimension including structure, people, process, and task. Strategies influence the results of an organizations performance. The degree of influence, resulting from the factors, however, may be more critical in some than others. Soft factors are also called people oriented and they involve executors of strategies, all activities that take place in communication and the level of consensus during the implementation of strategies in organizations.

Regionally, Plance (2016) in Ghana shared development of the strategy is very easy for many organizations but the ensnaring pitfall of strategic management and its implementation is the inability of organizations to translate strategy into a corporate purpose and communicate the same to its middle-level and junior staff for effective execution. The short-term planning aspect and creation of accountability measures also negatively impacted on the success of strategic implementation. It is also evidenced that to successfully execute the plans, the organization must create a belief system to the team at the organization, support the strategy by releasing sufficient resources to be used when executing the strategies.

Locally, Macharia (2016) the successful strategy implementation practices are vital and pivotal to the success of the company. These practices inform the company direction and ensure that the focus is directed since good implementation practices lead to achievement of goals. Anytime the management team and the employees work as a team and are fully involved in all the steps of the strategy, right from the creation, implementation/execution, monitoring and evaluation and getting feedback at the last stage; it will always lead to high organizational performance, increased productivity, high profits and high outcomes. As such, getting high organizational performance require the firm to ensure that strategic objectives are realistic and aligned to the organizational goals, they are clearly communicated to all team players and resources are availed in time.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Strategy implementation is a key component of the strategic management process. There is a lot more effort and resources invested by organizations in the formulation process than the implementation and control of strategy (Satyro, Sacomano, Contador, Almeida & Giannetti, 2017). There are high failures rates reported which are attributable to failure in the strategy implementation. Various sources have reported implementation failure rate above 60%. Axon, Morrissey, Aiesha, Hillman, Revez, Lennon and Boo (2018) indicate that about 70% of all change initiatives fail and suggests that companies on average deliver only 63% of the performance their strategies promise and even worse, the causes of this strategy-to-performance gap are all but invisible to top management. And in an effort to bridge the gap in performance, there is need to put a lot of efforts in implementation of the developed strategy. There are several studies that have covered the concept of strategy implementation and performance including Siele and Kagiri (2017) investigated the organizational structure on strategy implementation in non-governmental organizations in Kenya. Findings show positive correlation between strategy implementation and organizational structure. The organizational structure enables an organization to gain competitive advantage, depending on the value the organizational design brings. Obiero and Genga (2018) on strategy implementation and performance of Kenya Revenue Authority revealed that resource allocation, performance target strategy communication and strategy supervision significantly influenced firm performance of KRA. Arogo (2018) considered the Top 100 Mid-Size Enterprises in Kenya and the factors that influence them in strategy implementation and noted that the structures, systems, culture and management support played a significant role in strategy implementation. All the above studies were done based on different conceptual, contextual and demographic backgrounds; none of them specifically looked at the influence of senior management commitment on performance using a case study of selected church owned primary schools in Kiambu hence creating the gap that the current study seeks to fill.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study sought to analyze the influence of senior management commitment on performance of church owned primary schools in Kiambu County.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource Based View

The Resource Based Theory is a strategic management theory that is frequently and largely used in project planning. This theory was developed by Barney (1991) who stated that resources ought to be valuable, imitable and not easily substituted so as an organization can gain strategic competitive advantage. An organization that that is ready to prosper must bring in new innovations to remain significant in the rapidly changing business environments. The researcher further suggested that organizations that have their own resources have a positive influence on performance and resources become its key strategy. If a firm is in possession of unique resources, then that warrants its superior performance compared to competitors in the same industry Barney (1991). Based on the deductions by Barney (1991), the theory can be abridged as; the possession of valuable and rare organizational resources translates to strategic capabilities. Additionally, if the owned resources are both non-substitutable and inimitable, the organization will gain from strategic management capabilities. Consequently, a firm that enjoys strategic management capabilities such as resource availability and strategy communication enjoy improved performance (Newbert, 2007).

This resource based theory emphasises on a notion that improved organizational performance is a function of internal affairs and not the industry that the organizations operates (Hart and Dowell 2010). According to Almarri, and Gardiner (2014), strategic management and implementation capabilities have been customized and developed from time to time. These capabilities have been associated with strategic management success and have led strategic communication as a strategic organizational capability that can lead to benefits. Organization should rely on resources during the process of production as they are valuable inputs and they can be categorized in various ways such as human capital, physical capita and organization capital (Currie (2009).

Therefore, capability is a technical capacitating method that enables an organization to perform and undertake a task by utilizing its unique resources as they are the primary goals set by an organization. In this modern era, organizations that are hyper are said to have capabilities that enables them to manage and generate resources dynamically resulting to profits. This indicates that various aspects of an organization operations and their performance are influenced by the strategic capabilities they have, their resources and not by the industry's structural characteristics (Currie, 2009).

This theory is significant to this study as it is related to variables resource availability and strategic communication and how they influence the performance of an organization. It gives a brief description of resource allocation and their effective utilization to enhance on performance of an organization which was the dependent variable of the current study. The resources discussed are human, technological, financial and physical assets which can be used use and ensure projects are completed successfully enhancing on their implementation.

Agency Theory

This theory was developed by Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick in the 1973.The theory asserts that agency cost is caused by the conflict of interest between the principal and the negotiator. This outcomes of the disagreement for example, when senior managers who are accountable for important decisions of the firm are not primarily applicants of the firms' net assets and they do not bear a major share of the wealth effects of the decisions.

This theory forecasts that in well operating merchandise, where there is ideal data and the ability to monitor, there should be less struggling in aligning inducements between the applicants and the negotiator's (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). If the applicant has the ability to sufficiently monitor the negotiators output, it can design sanctions and inducements to encourage optimal behavior. Moreover, if the negotiator knows that the applicant will become aware of the poor output and there are shifting options in the merchandise, then the negotiator will be prevented from performing poorly. The negotiator will also be concerned about reputational effects of poor quality service provision. Agency difficulties are most likely to arise between the shareholders of the firm (applicants) and its management (negotiators).

This theory is based on the applicants-negotiator relationships which live between the owners and managers (Yolles & Di Fatta, 2017). The agency theory has obtained importance in the wake of strategic management scandals. It is well known that conflict of interest and information asymmetry exists between company managers (insiders) and shareholders & other stakeholders (outsiders). Due to lack of enough public disclosure by organizations, the number of risk perceived by investors rises significantly. Dominici and Yolles (2016) argue that this theory cuts the cost of disputes into structuring costs, monitoring costs and costs of connecting a set of contacts.

Strategic management capabilities such as employee competency and senior management commitment are the some of the essentials in aligning the activities in the organization for better performance. The agency theory states that such strategies reduce the agency costs by coordinating the goals of an organization and its agents (Song, Wang & Cavusgil, 2015). This theory is relevant to the study because it explains how employee competency and senior management communication will significantly contribute to the organizational performance.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Colwell and Joshi (2013) conducted a study on the impacts of institutional pressure and the commitment of top management and their effect on the performance of an organization. The results of the study revealed that strong commitment from the top management increases how operational pressure relates with organizational sensitivity. Commitment is basically the agreement created by the participant of an organization towards the achievement of the organizational missions and objectives. Senior management commitment helps in creating a mutual relationship among the employees; this makes it much easier when it comes to understanding and solving their needs which will make them feel appreciated and in the end they will work towards improving the performance of the organization. This implies that the existence of a close and mutually beneficial relationship between senior management team and employees will help the entire organization in achieving its set goals.

Javed (2015) conducted a study to determine how top management commitment affects the quality of management. According to the study, top management commitment positively affects the quality of management. Therefore senior management should be committed towards engaging in the provision of quality effort by abiding to the organizational terms, rules and policies. This can be achieved by simply ensuring that there is effective communication and reinforcement of quality statements that are aimed at improving organizational performance. The senior management team should be committed towards implementing decisions that are of great value to the organization. They are the ones considered to occupy a decisive position on the success or failure of the organization hence their commitment in serving the organization will highly determine if the organization achieves its goals or not. They should have the necessary skills that will guide them in becoming very committed towards the management of the strategic planning process.

Abomaleh and Zahari (2014) researched on how management commitment affects customer satisfaction and quality of services using a case study of Saudi Arabia public service sector. Senior management should be committed on its employees by ensuring that they are well trained to handle complex problems that may put the organization at a risk of decreasing its performance. They should focus on empowering and rewarding employees for their best services. It is believed that when the senior management team is committed towards improving the delivery of quality service, there will be more provision of training resources. Such training may enhance the skills of employees in dealing with their competence in making appropriate suggestions for decisions making.

Iden and Eikebrokk (2015) researched on how the involvement of senior management, commitment from the organization and group efficacy affects the process of implementing ITIL benefits. Top management's task is multidimensional and oriented towards achieving overall organizational prosperity based on the organization's mission, goals and strategies and business processes. Hence their commitment is highly valued as it helps in the provision of frontline employees through guiding and encouraging them during the process of delivering services. In any quality improvement plan, senior management must be seen as trusting in customer service and also showing that service quality and customer service really matter before a corporate culture becomes very strong and difficult to change and the standard of service and customer satisfaction are substantially and lastingly improved.

Tzempelikos (2015) investigated on the commitment of top management and how they are involved in linking the effectiveness of key areas of management. The study aimed at examining the role played by top management in linking the effectiveness of key areas of management. The target population included 304 suppliers from different sectors. The study used questionnaires in the process of collecting data. The study findings revealed that commitment from the top management positively contributed to the effectiveness of key management areas. Top management support has indeed helped in impacting the overall performance of an organization. Top management commitment is geared towards providing frontline employees with the best guidance and encouraging them offer the best services possible. In any quality improvement program, commitment from the top management is aimed at improving delivery of services to customers.

Kamau (2015) investigated on the factors that influence the commitment of employees and its effect on the performance of an organization using a case study of Kenya Airports Authority. The study was aimed at establishing the factors that influence employee commitment in Kenyan companies. The target population of the study included 168 employees drawn from the various functions of the organization. The study used stratified sampling to select a sample of data which was collected through use of a questionnaire and analysed done using (SPSS) version. It was revealed that organizational factors strongly influence the commitment of employees. Employees are the most important resources within organizations and without them it is impossible to achieve the organizational goals and objectives. It is therefore very important to give them all kind of support and commitment so that they can deliver their best.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design is the prototype which the researcher will follow during the process of data collection and analysis in line with the research questions (Rahi, 2017). This study adopted a descriptive and explanatory research in exploring the influence that strategy implementation has on performance. Descriptive research design is efficient as it answers questions on the what, the when, if and how and gives answers as they are found. In the case of this study, the respondents included the school administrator/director/principal, the church leader, and the deputy head/senior teacher for the church-owned learning institutions within Kiambu County. According to the records at the Ministry of Education at the Kiambu County, there are 64 church-owned primary schools operating within the county. The criteria used in selection of the institution were that only those schools that were Christian based were targeted. The study targeted 1 principal, 1 deputy principal and 1 church leader from all the 64 church-based primary schools operating within the county. The target population was therefore 192 respondents. The study adopted census which according to Yin (2017), it is ideal since there is no generalization of findings as all elements are included and their opinion and views are included in the final findings and conclusions that are made. The study collected primary data using structured questionnaires. According to Kothari (2011) primary data are those which are collected a fresh and for the first time and thus happen to be original in character. The researcher engaged research assistants (RAs) who went to each church-owned primary school to help in the data collection process. The RAs were trained by the researcher on how to fill the research instrument and the ethics to abide by. After data collection, the questionnaires were scrutinized for completeness and if they had been completed as required, the data was coded and classified in terms of similarities then tabulated. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means and standard deviation were used to analyze quantitative data. SPSS program was also used in analyzing quantitative data. Inferential statistics (multiple regression) was used to determine the degree of association between the study variables the independent variables of (employee competency, senior management commitment, resource availability and strategy communication) and how they correlated to the dependent variable (organizational performance). The study adopted the following model:

$$Y=\beta 0+\beta 1X1+\varepsilon$$

Where: Y = Organizational Performance; X1 = Senior Management Commitment; ε = Error term/Erroneous variables; β0 = the minimum change in Y when the rest of the variables are held at a constant zero; β = measure of the rate of change i.e. β1 measures the rate of change in Y as a result of a unit change in X1.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The study established that senior management team empowered their employees in improving their performance and that their senior management team was committed in training and rewarding our employees for their service delivery. Respondents further agreed that their senior management team ensured that there is mutual relationship among the employees and that their senior management team was committed towards delivering of quality service. On the other hand, respondents moderately agreed on whether senior management team was committed towards making planned decisions that helped them to achieve the set goals and objectives. The results of regression analysis showed that a unit increase in senior management commitment when all other factors are kept constant would increase in performance of church owned institutions. At the same time, senior management commitment was found to have a significant effect on performance of church owned institutions.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to determine the effect of senior management commitment on performance of church owned institutions. Based on the findings, the study concludes that senior management support has significant effect on performance of church owned institutions. Senior management commitment allows the management of the organization to empower their employees in improving their performance and in training and rewarding employees for their service delivery. Senior management commitment also fosters mutual relationship among the employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on beta coefficient of regression, senior management commitment was seen to have a large effect on performance of the church owned institutions. Therefore, the study recommends that the senior management team of all church owned schools in Kenya should increase their commitment on implementation of the formulated strategies so as to enhance performance of their organizations. Senior management team of these institutions should be more committed towards making planned decisions that will help them to achieve the set goals and objectives.

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