AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC CHANGE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS (A CASE OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE COAST REGION, KENYA)

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of change implementation has often indicated that people tend to resist change especially if not effectively implemented. Major failures are associated with the implementation phase. The general objective of this study was to assess the implementation of strategic change in tertiary institutions; specifically to identify the change implementation pitfalls in tertiary institutions, determine the strategies adopted by tertiary institutions in strategic change implementation and determine the factors that influence the success of strategic change implementation in tertiary institutions. The study adopted the force field theory of driving forces and restraining forces. The population of the study was drawn from the staff and management of two government tertiary institutions in the coastal region of Kenya. A sample size of 102 was targeted; however the real analysis was based on 98 respondents. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists version 12. The study revealed that strategic change implementation is a critical phase in change management and institutions should involve all stakeholders and work towards ensuring that the major pitfalls are mitigated and deliberate efforts to enhance the success factors. The realization of the anticipated goals of the implementation of strategic change in tertiary institutions is to a greater extend, however more capacity building on change management is necessary.

Keywords: Change, Strategy, Implementation pitfalls

1.0 Introduction

Change in both private and public institutions is inevitable. The ability to effectively manage strategic change is today one of the cornerstones of effective management. Organizational changes encompasses changes in attitude, natures and interest of employees, technological and environmental changes related to an organization and changes in policies, rules and regulations affecting the organization. Owino et al (2011) found that education in Kenya is experiencing changes in the form of expansion of the sector, diversification of provision, more heterogeneous student bodies, new funding arrangements, increasing focus on accountability and performance, global networking, mobility and collaboration. These changes have challenged institutional management that, more than ever before, need to revise and specify institutional mission statements, assess impact of new sources of funding, meet requirements for accountability, consider participation in globalization and international competition and the requirements for national, regional and international integration. As the technological environment changes, the methods of producing goods and services, jobs become increasingly complex and technologically more independent. An organization also faces its own changes in structure, authority, responsibility and job restructuring. These changes can cause challenges for the organization and their managers and require a comprehensive strategy for effective adoption. Suitable models have to be developed to ensure effective implementation of strategic change. In today's lifelong-learning framework,

tertiary education provides not only the high-level skills necessary for every labour market but also the training essential for operational, supervisory and even management staff in different careers. It is these trained individuals who develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies, support civil society, teach, lead effective governments, and make important decisions and innovations that affect the entire societies. It is therefore important for the institutions to not only keep a brace with the many changes taking place across the globe and more especially those that directly affect their delivery of their mandate but also ensure successful implementation of strategic change.

Tertiary institutions have in the recent past been undergoing enormous changes. Events taking place in the developed nations such as United States of America, Japan, China and India have led to many changes in policy and guidelines issued to the tertiary institutions by the government. Benchmarking tours and studies in the Far East and the west to learn how those countries have been able to transform themselves in terms of technological advancement and generally the systems of managing their educational affairs has been part of the ministry of higher education strategy to ensure quality in tertiary institutions.

With all these change initiatives in place we expect to have better run tertiary institutions, producing high quality graduands that fit effectively in respective industries and capable of driving the country to the much anticipated vision 2030.

The amount of time to implement any plan and align people around its breakthrough strategies is an enormous job for management in tertiary institution. The recent guidelines issued by the government of Kenya through the ministry of Education suggests that by pursuing a greater mission differentiation and reallocation of resources will be in a better position to respond to the changing environment.

1.1   Statement of the problem

The success of Strategic change implementation depends on how well the change was executed.   Despite of the fact that tertiary institutions invest a great deal of time and resources in planning for change, many a times the change process is either very slow or fails totally to achieve the desired objective. This means that something is wrong with the implementation phase. More often the change implementation process has been faced with failure leaving a lot of questions unanswered on the entire implementation phase. This study therefore seeks to assess the implementation of strategic change in government sponsored tertiary institution.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Strategic Change Implementation

Technology is an important force of the organizational behaviour and attitude. The use of computers has facilitated better performance. Organizations that use modern technology are reputed and are welcomed by employees, customers and the society at large. The market of an organization keeps changing and these changes have profound effects on organizations. A successful organization is fast in developing a suitable strategy to beat competition. When the competitor is very strong considering a merger may be one of the best strategies. Sagimo (2007), hold that a Manager is a central figure in organizational change implementation. As a decision maker, the manager is the ultimate change agent in the organizations. The major challenge of initiating strategic change has been how one can lead tertiary institutions that seem in favor of reforms but allergic to change. Kanter (1989) on her book "when giants learn to dance" suggests three ways to implement change; by restructuring organization to create synergies, opening the boundaries of the organization to form strategic alliances, and creating new ventures from within the organizations innovation or enterprise approach. Organization may be at a state of equilibrium, with forces pushing for change on one hand and forces resisting change on the other hand. Kurt Lewin expressed this phenomenon in his force field theory, which suggests that equilibrium is maintained by the driving forces and restraining forces. According to Lewin, the change process has three major steps. Unfreezing, change and re-freezing. Unfreezing means the old ideas, behaviour, attitudes and value systems are set aside to give way to new ideas. It involves identifying the need for change, increasing the driving force to change and reducing the resistance forces to change. A conducive environment is created within the organization to promote morale and innovativeness. Unfreezing creates motivation for change. When people feel uncomfortable with the present situation, they may see the need for change. McShane (2008) argues that unfreezing the organization involves confronting all employees with the need for and getting them to believe that change is necessary. Because organizations are by nature static, attempts at

incremental or gradual change will usually be successfully resisted by those within the organization who stand to loose from the change effort. Thus many experts recommend bold, drastic action to signal employees that change is coming. Cole (2006) highlighted that human beings seem to prefer to use driving force to bring about change. They want to win by exerting pressure on those who oppose them, but as Lewin's model suggest, the more one side pushes, the more the other side resists, resulting to no change. Organization should rather focus on removal or at least weakening of the objections and fears on the resisting side. Cole (2006) further argues that the initial policy should not be how can we persuade them of our arguments for change but rather what are their objections of fears, and how can we deal with them. Kanter (1989) also agrees with reducing opposition rather than try to impose new ways of working as the principal approach to Strategic change implementation. At strategic level, the Management should identify priorities and targets, provide adequate resources to carry for effective change implementation and allow for mistake within reason. Development of a positive employee attitude towards strategic change and providing appropriate means of learning for the staff goes a long way in overcoming the challenges associated with strategic change implementation. The second stage in Lewin's model is change itself. This may occur through assimilation of new information, exposure to new concepts, or development of a different perspective. Changing involves learning new ideas gradually to replace the old ones. The organizational members are encouraged to adapt to the new ideas and attitudes. New and old systems co-exist. Porter (1998) observed that refreezing involves embracing the newly acquires values, behavior and structure. The old ideas are totally discarded and new ideas fully accepted. It includes reinforcing the newly learned behaviors, finding fits between organizational components and maintaining the fits. Refreezing an organization involves tying to solidify the new strategy so that employees' behavior becomes second nature. If change will affect the past comfort of the staff, they will then wish to revert to the old ways. Koontz (2008) observes that the top management should especially play a leading role in reinforcing the acquired or new behaviour.

Bringing about change, particularly in higher education settings, is a difficult task. Without effective change leadership, strategic change implementation may not be effectively realized. Sagimo (2007), describe change leadership as transformational leadership that entails the ability to energize and alert groups for specific changes and to drive change. Chaudron (2010) observed that stakeholders play important roles as advocates, sponsors, partners and agents of change. Understanding the roles of different stakes in tertiary institution allows the management an opportunity to engage them more productively in change implementation. Sagimo (2007) observed that change implementation process has two dimensions, timing and scope. The challenge of monitoring change associated with timing relates to the selection of appropriate time the employees are likely to adapt to the strategic change faster. Williams (2009) argues that change should not be introduced at bad times. Timing is strategic and depends on factors at the organization's operating cycle and preparations which precedes the change. Sagimo further argues that selection of appropriate scale of change is critical in change implementation. The scope of change depends on the change strategy. Williams (2009) holds that it is imperative to invest therefore in the right people as leadership teams to drive the implementation process.

2.2 Force Fields Theory

The theoretical framework is based on force field theory by Kurt Lewin and the preposition that change is given the opportunity to occur when three elements are in place simultaneously. These elements are dissatisfaction with the present situation, a compelling vision of how the change will create a better future, and first steps for reaching the vision. If any of these elements is missing or collectively they are less powerful than the resistance to the change, then change will not take place. Thus the first part of an intervention focuses on creating a common database and the foundation for the dissatisfaction. Following that, the intervention moves to creating a future that is far more desirable than that which caused the dissatisfaction. Armstrong (1995) took the view that change process starts with awareness of the need for change. An analysis of this situation and the factors that have created it leads to a diagnosis of distinctive characteristics and an indication of the direction in which needs to be taken.

2.3 Empirical literature

Various related researches on the area under study have been conducted on the subject of change in higher Education Institutions in Kenya. The studies have pointed out that change management remains a challenge in the realization education and training goals of institutions of higher learning. In a panel of experts report on review of performance contracting (2010) lack of adequate resources such as human, financial, technical and information were identified as one of the key emerging challenge of implementation of performance contract. Kihiko (2010) in a study on

Management and Leadership in Higher Education also revealed that Kenya is endowed with few financial, natural, human, as well as infrastructural resources. This challenge poses two options, the first and easier option is to forget about the vision and maintain status quo and the second option is to work within the confines of what we have, with the limited resources.

Makibiti, Matebelo and Thabo (2011) in a study on the role of government, industry and other stakeholders in skills development in TVET institutions observed that the implementation of reforms before anyone discusses what they are for is one of the major reasons for the resilience and resistance of particularly the academic community. The major challenge relates to the inadequate capacity, lack of transparency and participatory approach of the leadership and management of higher education institutions. Over the years, several studies have shown that consensus reached at the level of top management does not transpire effectively to the institution community. Bakerman and Fickenscher (2011) in a study of Change Management in Health care found that organizations with a history of poorly executed change programs will continue to struggle with new initiatives. They further held that successful change efforts require a supportive culture, which means that leaders must be intimately involved in driving and supporting the process with both action and words. Kiriri & Gathuthi (2010) in a study on Management of Performance in Kenyan Higher Education Institutions held that Institutions of higher education have been criticized for not playing their rightful role in national development. This has been partly attributed to not being able to manage their performance in view of the dynamic and turbulent environment they are operating in. The study further observed that most institutions of higher education have been caught up in the "business as usual" situation preferring doing things in the traditional ways as opposed to changing with the times. As a result, their survival has been at risk especially from those who have adopted the "business unusual" mentality. Ondiek (2010) in his study on culture in strategy implementation observed that in today's dynamic business world, strategies are very dynamic and therefore organizational culture has to be dynamic too and needs to adapt to the demands of business. In such a situation all employees will have confidence in the team's ability to meet challenges. Ogutu (2010) concluded that schools faced some challenges in the implementation of ICT projects. Notable among these challenges are inadequacy of ICT facilities.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey study research design. The respondents of this study were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure that each stratum has an equal chance of being represented. The researcher targeted at least 35% of the total population on each stratum. Data for this study was analyzed quantitatively through descriptive statistics where frequency and percentages were used in interpreting the respondents' perception of issues raised in the questionnaires. Data was first captured through Ms excel. Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Data was presented inform of statistics such as Frequency distribution tables, percentages, tables, and Pie charts.

4. Finding

Respondents in this research were dominantly males. This can be attributed to the fact that most of technical programmes that are offered in tertiary institutions are male dominated. In addition perceptions of most African communities do not favour the female gender in technical and science based programmes. This has further been reflected even on the staff. Majority of the respondents were aged between 31years and 50. Notably the fresh graduates who might possibly be below the age are the minority. This suggests that employment of fresh graduates is quite low.

In terms of education level, it was realized that most of the staff/respondents were degree holders and still a good number were diploma holders. Very few had post graduate qualification. This implies that there is need to encourage the staff at diploma and certificate level to pursue higher education so as to increase on their capacity not only to train but also to implement change effectively. Although majority of respondents had undergone some training on change implementation, there is still a considerable number that have not had any orientation on change implementation. This is likely to remain a hindrance to successful change implementation in tertiary institution. The study identified lack of sufficient funds and lack of effective communication as the major pitfall to strategic change implementation. Skill limitations among some key staff was also identified as a setback to strategic change implementation and to some extend resistance to change which may result from lack of communication and skill limitation.

The approach that an organization adopts in implementation of change largely influences the results. The study found out that both proactive and reactive change approaches are dominant strategies in tertiary institutions. Institutes carry out long term planning whereby all anticipated changes are planned for in advance and also adopts a reactive strategy when dealing with Ministry regulations that are periodically issues and other factors related to rapid technological changes. On issues of consultation of the staff by the management when implementing change, the study revealed that consultation is done although some staff are never consulted.

Staff are informed in good time about anticipated changes although still some change are never given adequate time. Research findings also reveals that a higher proportion of the staff is given some orientation during the change implementation but still a considerable number are never given sufficient orientation on implementation of strategic change. The study also revealed that the top management is supportive in time of strategic change implementation. This is further supported by the fact that the majority of the respondents agree that strategic change realizes the anticipated results to a greater extent. The management in the tertiary institutions have adequate capacity to successfully implement strategic change and often hold meetings to discuss the same. This shows that where change has not been effectively implemented, there may be issues related to commitment of the concerned staff. Further to this, it is realized that financial limitations are sometimes a challenge to successful strategic change implementation.

It is also evident from the findings that for change to be successful, adequate planning and funding are paramount. In addition, there is need to enhance involvement of key stakeholders and two way communication if strategic change implementation is to be realized. The study also revealed that rewards and sanctions have an influence in the success of strategic change implementation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, it should be noted that a considerable number of staff still require orientation training on change implementation. Inadequate funds and lack of effective two way communication are greatest pitfalls to successful strategic change implement. This in turn leads to resistance to change among the staff in tertiary institutions. Both proactive and reactive approaches to strategic change management have been adopted by tertiary institution. The management of tertiary institutes should make proper analysis of underlying factors so as to effectively use both reactive and proactive approaches in change management. This also calls for proper timing and support of the top management. The study further revealed that successful strategic change is influenced largely by effective planning and ensuring adequate funding to sufficiently carry out the anticipated changes. The study also revealed that stakeholders should be engaged through effective communication with the management. Rewards and sanctions also were found to influence the success of strategic change as they provide motivation to the staff.

Tertiary institution should continuously invest in building capacity of their staff in change management. The institutes should address the pitfall to strategic change implementation so as to mitigate on their likely effects. The institutions should also align their change strategy or approach to the prevailing conditions by clearly analyzing all the underlying factors. Effective planning plays a vital role to successful strategic change implementation. Stakeholders should be engaged fully whenever strategic change is implemented. Rewards and sanctions are an important way of motivating staff and gaining their commitment especially in the implementation of strategic change. Tertiary institution should device ways of motivating the staff for successful change implementation and also monitor and evaluate strategic change processes through meetings and other communication channels with stakeholders to enhance ownership and commitment. The researcher proposes further studies in the following areas:-

i. Challenges of implementation of strategic change in public universities.

ii. Investigate on perception of junior staff on change in public colleges.

iii. An assessment of performance contract implementation in tertiary institutions.

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