

INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERS INNOVATION SKILLS ON CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT OF NAKURU, KENYA

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Abstract: To succeed in marketplace, companies need to manage change more precisely in order to realize the full value of their transformation efforts. The study therefore examined the influence of strategic leaders' innovation skills on change management in the county government of Nakuru, Kenya. Theories underpinning this study were Upper Echelon Leadership Theory. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population of the study was 134 middle level management employees working in 10 ministries. Based on the small population, the study adopted a census survey. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires constructed on a 5 point likert scale. Questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability. To analyze the collected data, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics which included frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics which included regression and correlation analysis and data was presented in tables with relevant discussions. The study will inform the management of the county on the strategic leadership practices that would provide positive results as far as change management is concerned. The study face a major limitation given that some of the respondents were afraid of responding to the questionnaire fearing for its confidentiality. However the researcher assured them that the information they provide would be treated confidentially. The study established that leader's innovation skills had a 0.701 and had a positive significant relationship with change management in the county government of Nakuru. The study concluded that leaders' innovation skills had a significant influence on change management in the county government of Nakuru. It was recommended that county leadership should enhance innovative skills to enable them lead in change management. Possession of innovative skills by the county government will prevent frequent restructuring in the county structures as the leaders will be innovative enough to ensure they operate optimally within the established structures.

Keywords: Change management, County government, Innovation Skills, Leaders' Innovation, Strategic Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, organizations globally have strived to perform well (Chemengich, 2013). More so, efforts have been witnessed within the public sector where shifts in ways of operation have been made taking into account transparency and accountability (Hughes et al, 2000). This is because the public remains a central vehicle for development for both developed and developing countries. Strategic changes, therefore, have been adopted in many countries with impressive performance in service delivery. Determining the benefits accrued as a result of change management can be challenging if the scope and depth of the changes are not taken into account. Many aspects of strategic change are measurable such as processes and procedures, efficiency and other performance metrics. Other aspects of strategic change crucial in an

organization include employee morale and corporate culture. According to Zhang and Rajagopalan (2010) the most important feature in strategic change is performance metrics that measures the processes right from the beginning to the end and then thereafter monitoring is done continuously. It is against the above backdrop that service delivery to citizens by many developing nations globally and mainly Africa has been marred by poor leadership (EAC, 2003).

Strategic leadership practice has been said to be an important strategy for leading 21st-century organizations. This argument has been so due to the unpredictable environments in which most organizations (county governments) find themselves in. A number of scholars have defined strategic leadership practice as a leader's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically and work with followers to initiate changes that create a viable future for the organization (Serfontein, 2010; Jooste & Fourie, 2010). The available discussions on strategic leadership practice indicate that strategic leaders influence others, is futuristic and that the strategic leader holds both short term and long term goals simultaneously.

Strategic leadership involves creating long term purpose and vision of the firm. The purpose and vision of an organization bring into line the activities of all people in the firm (Harris, 2008). A good vision is lively and everyone in the firm comprehends it and act by it. It is also full of ambition and energy; hence employees keep talking about their firm's purpose and vision. However, firms fall into a trap when leadership are fixated on their vision and ignore emerging market prospects (Nel, 2008).

Strategic leadership is also widely regarded as one of the key drivers of strategy implementation (Barend, 2016). Therefore, from a business perspective it is the identification, development, and use of organisational leadership which is critical to organisational performance (Redmond, 2016). Thinking strategically and differently is necessary for modern leaders when it comes to their role, capabilities and how to improve themselves in order to lead their organization to long-term success (Thompson, Strickland & Gamble, 2010). Dinwoodie, Quinn and McGuire (2014) indicates that, through leadership strategy, the potential of individuals and groups is unleashed throughout an organization and assists an organization achieve success

Strategic leadership interference is more evident in large, diversified organizations with many divisions, and which often fall into the trap of imposing highly bureaucratic controls as a result of financial restrictions, the political context and the short-term demands of the markets. Government-owned or funded organizations, for example, would constrain strategic leaders. The very fact that leadership in most democratic regimes is changed after limited terms is an incentive to use tight financial controls in order to deliver short-term results. High levels of diversification, budget deficits, political issues, and accountability for even the smallest amount of money are other factors that constrain strategic leadership in most diversified organizations (Rowe & Nejad, 2009).

According to Center for Creative Leadership (2004), leading strategically involves the discovery of key things in an organization that can do well and also create the conditions that are required for the discovery. This requires organizations to understand the learning process of strategy where strategic leadership takes up the role of driving organizations to become continual learning engines. Mapetere, Mavhiki, Nyamwanza, Sikomwe and Mhonde (2012) indicate that, crafted strategies in organizations have to be effectively implemented in any given organization by strategic leaders who must be aware of the need to strategically plan the future of their organizations.

Strategic leadership is a key driver to an organization's success to strategy implementation according to Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2013) which is broadly recognized as one of the main drivers of effective strategic execution where strategic leaders play an important role in promoting competitive advantage of an organization over long term (Marriott, Du Plessis, Manichith and Sukumaran 2014). This type of leadership has been seen to assist organizations deal with the global economy (Zoogah, 2011). Center for Creative Leadership (2004) points out that strategic leaders are leaders who develop and discover strategies and grip it in a continuing state of formulation, implementation, reassessment and revision. This leaders do not however come easily in organizations and according to Forbes, only 10 percent of leaders exhibit strategic skills which is an inadequate number considering the demands of organizations today (Beatty, 2010). Beatty points out that strategic skills are not only required in time of growth but also in difficult times in an organization when resources are tight to ensure that resources in organization are focused in the right areas (Beatty, 2010).

According to Kirimi and Minja (2010), strategic leadership practices are important because they shape the formation of strategic intent which influences successful strategic practices in an organization. This argument is also supported by

Ireland and Hitt (2005) who observed that strategic leaders are important because they create organizational meaning and purpose. Strategic leadership practices enable organizational leaders to influence their followers to contribute effectively to the accomplishment of the goals and objectives of the organization (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, & Nwankwere, 2011).

Strategic leadership practice is important for organizations because it enables the organizations' leaders to develop the organizations' vision, mission, strategies and culture (Gill, 2010). In this view, Serfontein (2010) noted that through strategic leadership practice, leaders are able to understand better the organization's environment. This view is also supported by Gerras et.al, (2010) who asserted that through strategic leadership practice, the leader affects the desired organizational goals by envisioning, influences the organization's culture, allocates resources, directs policy and builds consensus on the future.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Change management is a key leadership role that has not yet been embraced by many managers. Kent, (2014) asserts that one of the prerequisites for organizations to survive and prosper is solid and sound leadership. The author emphasizes the fact that organizations need rational, opinionated and well articulated leadership if they are to flourish in a digital era. According to Kent (2014), true leadership is difficult in an institutional culture that abhors change, which is not an exceptional situation in most institutions today. The survival of all organizations globally and indeed in Africa is gradually becoming dependent on the capability to adopt change and reflect dynamism. Leadership and management of the modern firm is the key to ensuring sustainability and relevance by spearheading change. As agents of change, leaders can borrow from strategies in the private sector on transformational leadership so as to swiftly adopt new technology and procedures that can make their companies an equal player in this age of competition in the information society (Fink, 2010). However, there is limited literature on research and publication to document the case studies of effects of effective strategic leadership on change management. Political leadership in Kenya plays an instrumental role in the management of public institutions. Due to frequent changes in the political leadership, public institutions are in constant change management throughout their existence. The past election in 2017 brought with it a mixture of fortunes in the counties. Some of the newly elected and also reelected ones brought with them a raft of changes to either improve or rectify the management of the county governments. These changes led to confusion and resistance in the county's employees. The study seeks to examine strategic leadership approaches employed by the county executives to manage the intended changes in the county governments. To the researcher's knowledge, little or no research has been done in regard to the influence of strategic leadership on change management and more so in the county government of Nakuru hence the need for this study.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to examine the influence of strategic leaders' innovation skills on change management in the County Government of Nakuru, Kenya.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H₀₃: Leaders innovation skills do not significantly affect change management in County Governments of Nakuru, Kenya.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Upper Echelon Leadership Theory

The origin of upper echelon theory is traced to the research of Hambrick and Mason in 1984. According to the proponents of this theory, leaders' personal characteristics are reflected in the decisions they take in organizations. This theory was

founded on the premise that organizational outcomes were directly influenced by the knowledge, experience, and expertise of the strategic leaders (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The knowledge, experience, and skills are essential predictors of strategic leadership practice and organizational performance. Hambrick and Mason (1984) argued that organizations are a reflection of their strategic leaders. Above all, a number of scholars have proposed that strategic leaders play an instrumental role in realizing organizational performance (Henderson, Miller, & Hambrick, 2006).

The arguments on upper echelons theory strengthen the understanding of strategic leadership and organizational performance. The main variables in upper echelon theory include age, the number of years, work experience, and educational background are useful in providing demographic background the leaders who are responsible for strategic practices in the organization. The strategic leaders' job demand stems from task challenges, performance challenges, and executive aspirations.

Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (2009) related strategic leadership with envisioning, and predicting environmental changes, while at the same time enabling self-growth, by being flexible, and others' growth by empowering them. Menz (2012) views strategic leaders as being critical organizational assets that engage in several strategic actions for the organization. In the context of this study, the demographic characteristics of the leader responsible for strategic leadership practices were found to be important as in a way they influence the leaders' behaviour and subsequently organizational performance. The upper echelon theory variables and arguments resonate well with strategic leadership practices as a tool for enhancing change management in organizations.

7. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

7.1 Leaders Innovative Skills and Change Management

Innovation has become a critical competency for leaders operating in a world surrounded by challenges that require new thinking and solutions. Innovation is increasingly being acknowledged as a strategic imperative for sustainability and differentiation (Morris, Kuratko & Covin, 2011). Organizations with weak leadership tend to be less effective and are prone to constant restructuring and downsizing in order to solve their problems. On the other hand, organizations with creative and effective leaders work to avert the need for major restructuring and downsizing. These leaders run the organization effectively and therefore prevent it from reaching the stage of having to undertake major restructuring (Spillane, 2005).

An organization's productivity is pegged on its employees output. This means all employees should maximize their effort to achieve the full potential of the organization. The workforce is the most valuable asset in an organization. To effect good leadership, it is crucial to leverage the skills of the employees, the current technology, infrastructure and resources in the organization. The economic environment is turbulent; it is dynamic hence accelerating change. The rapid changes suit the current needs and wants of customers which makes it difficult to anticipate new and innovative opportunities. Today's leaders concentrate their efforts more on developing opportunities instead of identifying right opportunities (Sadler, 2005).

Skills and skills development are essential component of all efforts in this challenging era. Too many workers are simply unprepared to meet the needs of firms, particularly in more competitive economic environments. Skills are at the core of improving individuals' employment outcomes and increasing countries' productivity and growth. This is particularly relevant as today's developing and emerging countries seek higher sustained growth rates (World Bank, 2014). Skills development programmes enable employees gain employability. Employability includes skills, knowledge and competencies that enhances a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he or she so wishes or has been laid off, and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of his or her lifecycle (Omolo, 2013; Franz and Omolo, 2014).

Some of the benefits associated with leveraging of skills include increased profit margins which are associated with workforce that understands goals (Evans, 2004). Once an employee has understood his/her contribution in an organization, efficient methods of articulating the project are generated. A performance management system should be put in place to increase productivity. It should comprise: SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, result oriented and time bound) goals, visibility at all the levels in management, accountability between team-mates through relevant cascading of goals between employees and communication of goals at every phase in the change process (Buono & Kerber, 2008).

7.2 Strategic Leadership and Change Management

Change is the vein that keeps an organization alive and change management can make or break the organization. Change management practices include providing early and consistent communication, ironing out the kinks, timing it right, making the change desirable, making the benefits relevant, recruiting help from within, monitoring the change as it's implemented, communicating the change on all levels, fully integrating the change and easing up the pressure (Intuit QuickBase, 2012). Change is disruptive, messy, and complicated. Even with the best laid plans, events rarely occur exactly as they were predicted. "Real change in real organizations is intensely personal and enormously political," (Munkumba, 2010).

Blanchard (2008) reports that without strategies to engage and involve people in the process, organizations often fall short of the benefits they hoped to realize through their change initiatives. Even more detrimental than a failed change initiative is the fallout from the failure such as lost productivity, low morale, wasted time, and wasted money. Change can be triggered from either the internal or the external environment of any organization and can create knock-on effects within an organization. According to Robbrus and Sanghi (2006), the following forces of change were identified; nature of the workforce, technology, economic shocks, competition, social trends and world politics. These changes are more grandiose seemingly emanating from the organizational external environment. Once change occurs in an organization, it affects all parts of the organization Coles (2005).

According to Powell (2001), it is important for organizations to consider adopting change management practices that are compatible with the organization's Vision and Mission. Strategic change management is connected to the organization's competitiveness and reaction to changes in the environment. Change arises due to the need for an organization to exploit existing or emerging opportunities as well as to deal with threats in the environment. The factors that affect implementation of strategic change include organizational culture, structure, resources, leadership, etc. Successful change management process depends largely on the context in which change is taking place. The time within which change is needed, the scope of change, organization resources, characteristics needed to be maintained, diversity of staff groups, degree of change resources available, readiness of workforce to change and power that change leaders have to inspire change and play crucial roles in change management (Johnson & Scholes, 2003).

Robbins (2005) emphasizes the fact that some sort of reinforcement is necessary to produce changes in behaviour, so management needs to be very active during change phases to institute reinforcement tactics. One method to use that does not cost money is verbal reinforcement. An organization can change its structure and policy by simply writing new rules and procedures, but the workers are not going to change quite as easily. That is where the link between learning theories and organizational change really is and where reinforcement comes in as a vital part of organizational change. Whether it is negative or positive, some reinforcement is going to have to be put into place for employees to successfully adapt to changes in the organization.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive survey research design. The design enabled the researcher to describe the characteristics of the variables under study in relation to the practices in the County government operations. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) asserts that in descriptive design the problem is structured and well understood a fact that Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) agrees that descriptive design is most preferred because it gives a report on things as they actually are. The study was conducted in the County government of Nakuru County. The target population for the study were the chief officers (16), directors (20), financial officers (20), sub-county and ward administrators (78) in the County government. Therefore, a total of 134 respondents were targeted for the study. Given that the population is not as large; the study employed a census approach where all the 134 officers were taken as respondents. The researcher employed the use of structured questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The instrument was preferred since it facilitated the statistical analysis of data, which is in line with the objective of the study. Questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability. The primary data collected in this study was coded and tested for completeness and then analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics and presented using tables. Descriptive statistical techniques (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) were employed to analyze field data from questionnaires to assist the interpretation and analysis of data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Inferential statistics, in form of Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the relationship between the variables.

9. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The researcher aimed to collect data from 134 respondents. 134 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents. Out of the distributed questionnaires 105 questionnaires were returned from the respondents while 29 questionnaires were never returned. 7 questionnaires were not completely filled and therefore were not deemed fit for data analysis. 98 questionnaires were completely filled representing a response rate of 73%. Babbie (1990) suggested that a response rate of 60% is good; 70% is very good. Hence 73% response rate was characterized as very good.

9.1. Descriptive Statistics

9.1.1 Leadership Innovative Skills

The study further sought to examine respondents' views regarding leadership innovative skills in the county government of Nakuru. As such, the percentages of responses in each category of the Likert scale, the Chi-square and the p-value for all the responses were established. The findings from the analysis were as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Leadership Innovative Skills

	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	χ^2	P-Value
Innovative skills of leaders improves the sustainability of county government	22.4	45.9	22.4	7.1	2.0	57.408	.000
Creative and innovative leaders in the county government prevent it from having to undertake a major restructuring	12.2	34.7	29.6	16.3	7.1	26.796	.000
Due to leaders innovation skills, the county has been able to enhance its revenue collection	11.2	33.7	34.7	13.3	7.1	33.837	.000
Innovativeness of the county leaders have led to growth in service delivery	16.3	38.8	28.6	12.2	4.1	36.898	.000
The county through innovation skills has been able to expand its revenue base	9.2	34.7	42.9	10.2	3.1	60.673	.000
The innovative skills of the county leaders enables the county to undertake highly informed projects	12.2	25.5	41.8	14.3	6.1	38.837	.000
The county is able to see their projects to completion due their innovative leaders	10.2	21.4	36.7	19.4	12.2	21.490	.000
Valid N (listwise)	98						

Findings from the table indicated that 45.9% and 22.4% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that innovative skills of leaders improve the sustainability of county government. On the other hand, respondents were not sure whether creative and innovative leaders in the county government prevent it from having to undertake a major restructuring where 42.9% of the respondents agreed, 29.6% of them were neutral while 23.4% of the respondents disagreed. Further, respondents were undecided whether due to leaders innovation skills, the county has been able to enhance its revenue collection. 44.9% of the respondents strongly and/or agreed, 34.7% of them were undecided while 20.4% of them strongly and/or disagreed. It was also established that 55.1% of the respondents were in agreement that innovativeness of the county leaders have led to growth in service delivery. The researcher observed that respondents were not sure whether through innovation the county has been able to expand its revenue base. 43.9% of the respondents agreed, 42.9% of them were neutral while 13.3% of the respondents disagreed. Majority of the respondent comprising of 41.8 were not sure whether county leaders innovative skills enable the county to undertake highly informed projects. Lastly, it was also observed that respondents were not sure whether the county is able to see their projects to completion due to their innovative leaders where 31.6% of the respondents agreed, 36.7% of them were neutral and 31.6% of them disagreed with the statement. All the chi-square (χ^2) values were also significant at $p < .05$ level of significance indicating diverse opinions in respondents views.

9.1.2 Change Management

Finally, the researcher sought respondents' opinions regarding change management in the county government of Nakuru. The findings from the analysis were as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Change Management

	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	χ^2	P-Value
Leaders in the county government communicate change in all levels of the organization	17.3	43.9	16.3	13.3	9.2	36.898	.000
The county leadership has put in place proper communication channels to ensure change is communicated appropriately	5.1	35.7	33.7	14.3	11.2	37.510	.000
The leadership of the county have committed to ensure that changes occasioned by different conditions are easily adopted	11.2	32.7	36.7	16.3	3.1	40.061	.000
The leadership and the staff are committed to defend and implement the aspirations of the county in service delivery	6.1	43.9	33.7	14.3	2.0	63.939	.000
The county easily adopts to new technology to ease its operational efficiency	14.3	31.6	28.6	21.4	4.1	24.347	.000
Enhanced training enables the county leadership adopted improved technology in service delivery	16.3	42.9	27.6	10.2	3.1	47.816	.000
It's the responsibility of leaders in the county government to implement and manage change in the organization.	21.4	36.7	26.5	9.2	6.1	31.082	.000
Valid N (listwise)	98						

The table indicated that majority of the respondents comprising of 61.2% agreed that leaders in the county government communicate change in all levels of the organization. On the other hand, respondents disagreed that county leadership has put in place proper communication channels to ensure change is communicated appropriately. 40.8% of the respondents agreed, 33.7% were undecided while 25.5% disagreed. In addition, respondents were undecided on whether leadership of the county has been committed to ensure that changes occasioned by different conditions are easily adopted. This is because 43.9% of the respondents agreed, 36.7% of them were not sure while 19.4% disagreed with the statement. Additionally, respondents also were not sure whether the leadership and the staff are committed to defend and implement the aspirations of the county in service delivery. As such, 50% of the respondents strongly and/or agreed, 33.7% of them were neutral while 16.3% of them disagreed. On the other hand, respondents were neutral on whether the county easily adopts new technology to ease its operational efficiency. As for this reason, 45.9% of the respondents agreed, 28.6% of them were undecided and 25.5% of them disagreed. Further, respondents agreed that enhanced training enables the county leadership to adopt improved technology in service delivery where 59.2% of the respondents strongly and or agreed with the statement. Finally, 58.1% of the respondents strongly and/or agreed that it's the responsibility of leaders in the county government to implement and manage change in the organization. The Chi-square values were all found to be significant at $p < 0.05$ level of significance. This demonstrates that the respondents had very diverse views across the various aspects of change management in the county government of Nakuru.

9.2 Correlation Analysis

9.2.1 Leaders' Innovation Skills and Change Management

On the other hand, the study established the relationship between leaders' innovation skills and change management. The findings from the analysis were as presented in table 4.12

Table 4. 1: Correlations between Leaders' Innovation Skills and Change Management

		Leaders Innovation Skills
Change Management	Pearson Correlation	.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	98

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Findings from the table indicate that there was a strong positive significant ($r = .701$, $p = .000$) relationship between leaders innovative skills and change management. Thus, leaders' innovative skills had a vital role in determining change management in the county government of Nakuru. Hence, in order to enhance change management in the county government, leaders innovative skills need to be enhanced. Other researchers agreed with the findings. Omolo (2013) and Franz and Omolo (2014) found out that employability includes skills, knowledge and competencies that enhances a

worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if he or she so wishes or has been laid off, and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of his or her lifecycle

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings showed that leadership innovation skills are significantly correlated with change management in the county government. Therefore the study concluded that innovation skills among the leaders play an important role in change management in Nakuru county government. The study recommended that the county leadership should enhance innovative skills to enable them lead in change management. Possession of innovative skills by the county government will prevent frequent restructuring in the county structures as the leaders will be innovative enough to ensure they operate optimally within the established structures. The study also recommended that future scholars should focus on other factors that may influence change management. The findings of this study have indicated that leadership alone is not sufficient in explaining the variation in change management. Hence further studies will be required to conclusively establish determinants of change management in the counties.

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