3. Strategic planning and implementation: An educational institution perspective

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1. Strategic planning for an educational institution

1.1. Introduction

A strategic plan in the education sector is the physical product of the strategic planning process that embodies the guiding orientations on how to run an education system within a larger national development perspective, which is evolving by nature and often involves constraints (Chang, 2006). To have a strategy is to put your own intelligence, foresight, and will in charge instead of outside forces or disordered concerns (Pisel, 2008). Therefore, strategic planning offers education institution(s) opportunity to identify how it will commit resources over the long term in order to accomplish its mission (Hunt et al, 1997). It Projects forward as little as 3 to 5 years (Barry, 1986) or as much as 10-20 years (Herman, 1990; Hunt et al, 1997; Rumble, 1986).

Strategic planning is a process; an exercise in “what if” analysis, and requires the leadership team to evaluate the past, understand the present and predict the future (Scott, 2008). In educational institutions, strategic planning can therefore be described as a process which focuses on the learner and
learner outcomes; a change process for transforming educational organizations; a method of building consensus and common vision; a way of strategically managing the school; an information-age way of thinking about and solving education problems; an experience which involves all education stakeholders to achieve the preconceived goals and chart new ways. Strategic planning is therefore an important approach to educational planning in modern world.

So, what makes an educational institution plan strategic? Unlike other educational planning approaches, strategic planning has the following distinctive features.

1. Strategic planning process is an open-system which is not confined to an institution’s internal analysis, reports, studies and perceptions. It takes into consideration external forces and is constantly changing and seeking improvement as it moves towards a desired future.
2. It is a dynamic continuous process. It focuses on the process rather than the end result. As such, the value of strategic plan lies more in the journey than the destination. While strategic planning must indeed produce a product, a Strategic Plan document, the primary value comes from the teamwork, vision, commitment to and ownership of organizational success the planners gain through the process of making the decisions the document contains.
3. Strategic planning is a continuous process that does not end with the publication of a plan. In the process of implementation, the school’s strategic plan is periodically reviewed depending on the changing circumstances.
4. It is systematic in nature. A school’s strategic planning process is never haphazard. It is normally coordinated by a planning committee with very specific terms of reference. Such committee would use specific methodology to handle specific tasks in a sequential manner.
5. Strategic planning is people driven. Unlike other planning approaches which are carried out by a small bureaucratic minority in isolation from the clients and partners, strategic planning process extensively involves stakeholders within the institution and the community in general. As such, it permeates the whole institution from the top management echelons to the classroom where specific learning outcomes are expected.
6. Operating in and impacted by an environment with both internal and external factors. It takes into consideration the political and economic situations as well as the changing environmental circumstances.
7. Strategic planning emphasizes creativity, intuition and innovation seeing planning as both an art and a science.
1.2. Significance of strategic planning in schools

Strategic planning thrives on empowerment. This implies giving others in the organization a clear picture of what is important and the responsibility, freedom and resources to make their own decisions and be accountable for them. This results in adjusting existing power and authority relationships in the organization. In strategic planning, stakeholders are recognized as partners in the organization as opposed to outsiders. For instance, in educational institutions, educators feel they have all the solutions to education problems, rather than accepting that many of the concerns often raised are rooted in the larger community, which must have a solution in their resolution (Doyle and Latta, 2000). Strategic planning is deep founded not on traditions and normal operations but in the values and its indicators denoting achievement of those values. In strategic planning thus, it is suggestive that, for success to be realized, organizations should be flexible, creative and adaptive rather than being prescriptive, in their actions. Action plans should be constantly altered to remain consistent with larger strategic directions.

Thus, strategic planning is beneficial in that it maximizes the involvement of all stakeholders in the organization so that everyone has ownership in the process. It enables the organization to identify the strategic issues that face it and helps the administrators to establish priorities and how to deal with them. Further, strategic planning enables the management to ask questions that help them identify the system’s strengths and weaknesses. It enables the organization to build teamwork and expertise from within and encourages proactive rather than reactive management (Batrol and Martin, 1991; Doyle and Latta, 2000).

Strategic planning uses the need to maximize production of goods and services as the rationale for change. It provides a framework for developing and implementing strategies throughout an organization. It leads to better communication between the organization and the community. Strategic planning ensures better use of financial, physical and human resources and establishes an organized system of management that enables the management to lead the organization strategically.

Overtime, educational institutions that plan strategically will usually earn and retain a competitive advantage over a reactionary competitor.

1.3. Strategic thinking

The spirit of strategic planning in many organizations is hampered by several factors some of which include the following: lack of planning skills among staff; lack of strategic thinking; lack of understanding of the process
by some staff members; differences in the planning ability of top management officials; non-commitment by the leaders; lack of understanding among board members; lack of resources and poor introduction to strategic planning. The way out of these problems is strategic thinking.

According to Saffold (2005), bold, creative, thoughtful strategic vision is at the heart of every successful organization and every effective strategic plan. Strategic thinkers do not plan around the limiting factors mentioned above; rather, they deal with them through proactive planning and actions, turning them into strengths rather than limitations. The philosophy and spirit which drives strategic thinking and planning sees no problems or limitations, only challenges and opportunities. Managers have the opportunity to explore and lead their organizations into strategic planning if they accept challenges and enjoy adventure. Hence, systematic, disciplined, strategic thinking about the future of an organization provides the basis for the development of creative new approaches of an organization towards achieving effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The resultant outcome out of strategic thinking and strategic planning is development of strategies and strategic plans. Strategies are large scale action plans for interacting with the environment in order to achieve long term organizational goals. Strategies describe the way an organization pursues its goals given the threats and opportunities in the environment and resources and its capabilities (Brays, Rue and Zahra, 1996). A strategic plan is a detailed action steps mapped out to reach strategic goals. It addresses issue as to how to respond to changing conditions, how to allocate resources and actions to be taken to create unified and powerful organization wide efforts aimed at achieving strategic goals (Batrol and Martin, 1991).

2. Strategic management process

Strategic management is the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives (David, 2001). This definition implies that strategic management focuses on integrating all processes in an organization of management, marketing, finance, production/operations, research and development and information systems to achieve organizational goals. Sometimes, the term strategic management is used to refer to the process of strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation with strategic planning referring to the process of strategy formulation. The purpose of strategic management is to exploit and create new and different opportunities for the future providing an overall strategic direction to the management of the organization to achieve success through increased energy
which results from rallying behind a cause, and elimination of conflict and confusion of priorities; increased capacity where stakeholders are focused on what is important and less concerned about what isn’t; improved customer satisfaction; better solutions to problems affecting the organization; best human resource management practices; setting; performance measurement and aiding the drawing of work plans to guide the organizational operations.

3. Strategy formulation

Strategy formulation is concerned with making decisions with regard to defining the organizations guiding philosophy, core values, purpose, mission and goals. It also deals with establishing objectives, to achieve the mission and Aselecting the strategies to achieve the objectives and drawing a clear road map on how to implement the strategies.

3.1. Philosophy

An organization’s guiding philosophy establishes the values and beliefs of the organization and what is important in both life and business. It details with how business should be conducted, its views about humanity and its role in society, the way the world works and what is to be held inviolate (Brays et al (1996). The philosophy of an organization should establish the relationship between the organization and the stakeholders, suppliers, government and the community at large. Schools as social organizations should evolve philosophies articulating the importance of upholding the importance of humanity and the need to sustain life along with magnifying the very core functions of a school.

3.2. Purpose

Organizational purpose defines the fundamental reason why an organization exists. It describes how an organization facilitates the achievement of basic human needs or how it impacts the world. An effective purpose reflects people’s idealistic motivations to work for a particular organization. An explicit statement of purpose guides a variety of decisions that insiders and outsiders make regarding their association with, support of and actions for the organization. A statement of purpose is supposed to be straightforward and simple. It determines the organization’s direction and commitment. Organizational purpose is communicated to outsiders through public statements, corporate mottoes and slogans (Brays et al, 1996; Batrol and Martin, 1991). Accordingly, if attracted, outsiders become stakeholders such as customers, investors, or employees.
Organizational purpose should be communicated to insiders through oral and written statements and management actions. Organizational statements of purpose are determined by an organization by asking itself; what would the world lose if our organization ceases to exist? Why do we dedicate our energies to the organization’s effort? What does the organization do to fill basic human needs? What does our organization do that impact the world? Therefore, a purpose statement is a statement of mandate for an organization. The mandate has a source of authority, given to it by a governing body. The Education Act gives schools in Kenya the mandate to exist while universities derive their mandate from University Acts and charters and other legal documents like statutes.

3.3. Core values

Core values are essential and enduring tenets of an organization. In strategic planning values refer to core leadership values. These are guiding principles which do not require external justification, as they have intrinsic value and importance to those who are inside the organization (Collins and Porras, 1991). They define what an organization stands for. Values provide a sense of common direction for all employees and guidelines for their day-to-day behaviour. Thus as (Newberry, 1992) argues, in a school, administrators should identify the values they stand for because the values will guide administrative behaviour, set predictability, set the tone, and help create the ethos of the school.

To develop a purpose and articulate core values, organizations need to ask themselves the following questions:

- Does the organization have a clearly stated purpose?
- Is the authority source of the purpose noted?
- Does the organization filter its decisions according to the stated purpose?
- Does the process of developing and refining core values exist?
- Is there a written statement of core leadership values for the organization?
- Does the core value statement contain an explanation of the intent of the values?
- Does the organization filter its decisions according to the stated core values?

3.4. Mission

Mission is the overall goal of an organization, it is the anchor of an organizational system that provides a sense of direction and a guide to
decision making for all levels of management (Batrol and Martin 1991; Newberry, 1992). It is a strategy or focus for carrying out the purpose of an organization. It’s a summary of an institution’s identity, what it does, who it serves and where it serves them.

A mission statement describes the purpose, business and (if required) values of the organization. It is about what the organization is and what it does. Without a clear mission it is impossible for an organization to develop objectives and strategies. Mission statements define the boundaries within which an organization operates. It is the focus foundation upon which the entire planning initiative of an organization is built. A mission is articulated in a mission statement. A mission statement is a broad declaration of the basic, unique, purpose and scope of operations that distinguishes one organization from other types of organizations (Pearce and Robinson, 1988).

A mission statement is not an idle piece of syntax developed to be fashionable, and to be filled on an obscure shelf rather, it should be a meaningful directive for everyday life in an organization (Newberry, 1992). Studies of mission statements indicate that mission statements are made up of some of or all of the following components. They include: customers; products or services, location, technology, concern for survival, philosophy, self concept, concern for public image and concern for employees.

Doyle and Latta, (2000), while discussing means and criteria to evaluate mission statements advices that a good mission statement should be clear and precise and reflect the distinctive competence of the organization. He further argues that it should be broad enough to allow flexibility in implementation but not as broad as to permit a lack of focus; serve as a template and be the means by which everyone can make decisions. In addition, the mission statement should reflect the values, beliefs, and philosophy of operations of the organization/school and reflect the organizational culture. It should reflect attainable goals. Its wording should be clear to serve as an energy source and rallying point for the school. Finally, a good mission statement should be broad enough to allow exploration of new opportunities but specific enough to prevent the organization for deviating too far afield.

To manage the mission effectively, it must be communicated to and internalized by the managers and employees of the organization. Once accepted by the employees and managers, a mission becomes a common framework for making decisions and setting priorities. Employees are also able to relate different activities of the organization through the mission.

Due to the dynamism of the clients and consumers, suppliers, competitors, community, technology, government regulations, and other stakeholders’ needs, an organizational mission is bound to change, hence, the need to reexamine a mission statement from time to time. The ability of the
top management to sense the need for change and clearly delineate a new mission plays a crucial role in the future success of the organization.

Points to not when developing a mission statement include to:

- Ensure the reasons for having a mission statement are clearly stated.
- Process of developing a mission statement is defined.
- Ensure the organizational partners have a major role to play in the development process.
- Ensure there is a communication plan to involve the broader community.
- Internal stakeholders are given an opportunity to give their input.
- Ensure the mission statement has a clear meaning and without complicated jargon.

3.5. Vision

Vision provides guidance; the cores to be preserved and the future to stimulate progress towards to. The intent of vision statements is to conceptualize the preferred future, give focus to human energy in the context of the overall strategic plan (Newberry, 1992). Whereas vision simply defines what an organization wants to become, Collins and Porras (1991) argue that vision is one of the words used widely but least understood in the language, conjuring up different images for different people. Out of a long period of research, Collins and Porras (ibid) contend that a well conceived vision consists of two major components: core ideology and envisioned future. Core ideology defines what an organization stands for and why it exists. It defines the enduring character of an organization, a consistent identity that transcends its products. Indeed the core ideology of a great organization endures as a source of guidance and inspiration.

To crown the importance of a vision statement Collins and Porras (ibid), argue that it provides the glue that holds an organization together as it grows, decentralizes, diversifies, expands globally and develops work place diversity. The envisioned future is what an organization aspires to become, to achieve, and to create something that will require significant change and progress to attain. An effective vision must thus, embody the core ideology of the organization which consists of: core values and core purpose. A vision statement is thus crucial because it enables the organization to set direction and purpose, it promotes stakeholders interest and commitment; it encourages openness to unique and creative solutions, builds loyalty through involvement and it promotes efficiency and productivity.
3.6. Other strategic processes

Once the vision and mission are clearly identified, the institution must analyze its external and internal environment. This is known as environmental scan. One way of environmental scanning is carrying out SWOT analysis (SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). This is an assessment of areas of internal strengths and weaknesses of the institution and areas of opportunities and the threats existing in the external environment.

Besides environmental scan is the gap analysis. At this stage, the planning team evaluates the differences between the current outcome and the desired future, thereby identifying the existing gaps. This analysis defines the direction that the strategy must lead the institution to launch an effective education.

Another critical activity is benchmarking. This entails measuring and comparing the institution’s operations, practices and performance against others with best practices. Through an ongoing systematic benchmarking process schools find a reference point for setting their own goals and targets.

Then there is the identification of strategic issues. The school determines its strategic issues based on (and consistent with) its vision and mission, within the framework of environmental and other analyses. Strategic issues are the fundamental issues the organization has to address to achieve its mission and move towards its desired future.

3.7. Goals and objectives

Most mission statements are more specific than anyone’s thinking, but are hardly concrete directions for action. Just as mission statements try to make a vision more specific, objectives try to make mission statements more concrete. Many authors and managers use the terms goals and objectives interchangeably (Brays et al, 1996). However for purposes of this discussion both terms will be identified and explained. Goals are broadly defined targets or future end results set by management. They address issues relating to the whole organization and are stated in broad terms. Objectives are statements of what is to be achieved. Objectives are stated in terms of the desired levels of attainment within a specific time frame. Objectives are quantifiable, simply stated and measurable. Sometimes they are referred to as operational goals.

Setting goals and objectives is beneficial to an organization because goals can lead to increased performance; help to clarify expectations; facilitate the controlling function as they provide benchmarks against which progress can be assessed so that corrective action can be taken. Goals can lead to increased motivation in that, as they are met, feelings of sense of accomplishment,
receiving recognition and other rewards are rewarding to the achiever. Other benefits are that goals provide integration and coordination of employee action causing their efforts to be accomplished for common reasons; they help relieve boredom and monotony as they are revised from time to time giving the employees’ job a lease of life. Objectives can also form the basis of decentralization in that well defined objectives are helpful in achieving effective delegation of authority (Batrol and Martin, 1991).

3.7.1. Guidelines for setting organizational objectives

Setting objectives for an organization is an important part of management. The objectives determine how various scarce resources of the organization will be used be they financial, material or human. The following guidelines need to be observed:

- State the objectives clearly and specifically
- Include subordinates and win their acceptance
- Review progress frequently to ensure validity of the objectives
- Make objectives challenging, realistic and attainable.
- Coordinate objectives that is: make secondary objectives consistent with primary objectives.
- Base objectives on the best possible data
- Keep objectives flexible to allow for changes in the environment.
- Make objectives result oriented.
- Keep objectives to a reasonable number
- Ensure cost effectiveness in setting the objectives
- make objectives specific as to time
- Ensure that the objectives are geared towards achieving the organizational goals.

Expressed differently, objectives should be challenging, attainable specific and measurable, time bound and relevant. Batrol and Martin (1991) argue that challenging objectives lead to higher performance. Further, they say that objectives need to be challenging and work best when they are attainable. Specific and measurable objectives set what is expected and when they need to be achieved. Being time bound, objectives define the period of time within which the goals must be accomplished.

3.7.2. Benefits of objectives

Objectives are advantageous in organizations because:
They provide integration and coordination of staff action causing their efforts to be accomplished for common reasons.

- They provide mechanism for control in that they are usually broken into standards of performance where employees are held accountable for their performance against set standards.
- They provide motivation to those who are assigned the task of accomplishing them.
- Objectives help relieve boredom and monotony in organizations as they are usually revised from time to time giving employees’ job a new lease of life.
- Achievement of objectives when combined with feedback can increase job satisfaction for employees.
- Objectives can form the basis of decentralization in that well stated objectives are helpful in achieving effective delegation of authority. By providing targets managers reduce the need for detailed guidance.
- Clearly stated objectives help to reduce conflict in that they help to reduce misunderstandings and rivalry among organizational members. Such internal competition is often a manifestation of uncertainty regarding the overall direction of the organization.

3.8. Formulation of strategies

A strategy is a road map by which an institution moves from a current state of affairs to a future a future desired state. It defines where the institution is, where it is going and how it is going to get there. As such, courses of action or action programs are constructed based on the set goals and objectives with the aim of realizing the mission and vision of the organization.

4. Strategic implementation

Strategic implementation is a process where the management of an institution implements the designed strategic plan on a day to day basis with the view of maximizing output within the organization (Scott, 2008). Be that as it may, in many institutions, the process ends abruptly with the written document that strategic planning process produces. The strategic plan then gathers dust in the shelves as years go by. Although the concept of strategic planning resonates well in many organizations, many people remain skeptical about whether it actually works.

Yet other organizations have tried walking the strategic implementation path with little success (Famholtz and Kurland, 2005). So, what makes strategic planning a success?
1. When planning is made a corporate priority. Planning should receive proper attention, effort and support at every level within the institution.

2. Dedicating both physical and human resources to support planning. Strategic planning thrives on empowerment. As such, facilitation and proper training of all the stakeholders cannot be overemphasized.

3. Adequate, updated and accurate data is required. Basically, an institution’s strategic plan is only as good as the data its planners are relying on. Make sure to collect information that you can trust before investing time and efforts into a plan.

4. Engage people within and outside the organization both during the planning process and while implementing the strategies. Engaging more people will make it possible to spread the workload. Besides, the people engaged in the implementation will feel more ownership for the plan and the changes that result.

5. Set priorities. Although there are many objectives and strategies in any strategic plan, not all can be implemented and accomplished at the same time. Spread activities out over the life of the plan. Review the strategies and determine the best places to start. This may be influenced by opportunities for quick successes, by a logical ordering of strategies that depend on actions completed in earlier strategies, or by an annual cycle of organizational activities. A matrix that shows when each strategy will be started and how long it will take to complete may be a useful attachment to the plan.

6. Be realistic. It takes a lot of effort to actually make strategic planning work. Just writing a plan is not enough—there’s a lot of work to make it happen. Be ready for all of that to work.

7. Don’t copy and paste. Every institution is unique because it operates in and impacted by a unique environment with both internal and external factors. Strategic planning is a process; a journey that is meant to take you. Strategic planning is meant to take you from where you are to where you want to be—a template has no idea where you’re starting from.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of strategies

It is essential for periodic monitoring and evaluations of strategies, tactics, and action programs to be carried out. This helps measure the degree of success and evaluates the effects of specific actions on long-term results and on the organization’s vision, mission and strategies (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997).

Monitoring is the process of obtaining information and using it to make an assessment that can improve future decisions and actions that needs to be
taken in the organization. It uses data collection methods to provide managers and the main stake holders with early indications of progress and achievement of objectives set in the strategic plan. Monitoring relates to tracking the performance of the key elements in the strategic plan activities on a regular basis that is, inputs, activities, results and time. Inspection and internal auditing to assess progress and timeliness of activities are crucial monitoring activities.

Monitoring and evaluation are critical because they enable an organization to make decisions and recommendations about contingency planning; identify the strengths and weaknesses of a programme and implementation processes, enable judgments to be made on whether the programme and activities are having an impact on desired outcomes and therefore achieving objectives. Monitoring and evaluation also determines whether the interventions are on track lest the organization loses focus. Through monitoring and evaluation also the organization is able to get feedback through data collected to support programs and policies. Monitoring evaluation also enables the organization to determine stakeholder and target group satisfaction as well as meeting demands for accountability. Through monitoring and evaluation therefore an organization should measure current performance against previously set expectations, and consider any changes or events that may have impacted the desired course of actions.

6. Review of strategic plan

After assessing the progress of the strategic planning process, the school needs to review the strategic plan, make necessary changes, and adjust its course based on these evaluations. The revised plan must take into consideration emergent strategies, and changes affecting the organization’s intended course.

7. Outcomes of strategic planning

Strategic planning is a critical activity for institutional managers and administrators. Through this process leaders set the organization's future direction and define the specific outcomes and strategies that will lead to achieving that direction. Outcomes of strategic planning are serialized as follows:

1. The strategic plan

A plan, which is the product of the strategic planning process, is a living reference framework for action. It is the result of consensus building process
which must be designed in a manner to allow for adjustments in the process of implementation. Besides policy and expenditure frameworks, the plan must also include the hierarchy of objectives, key actions and institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

2. **Exposure**

   A companying the written document is the revitalization experienced by the people in the organization as a result of participation in the planning process. There is always the new feeling of appreciation for the work, a new sense of possibilities and renewed commitment.

3. **Sense of belonging and ownership**

   Strategic planning gives stakeholders a perfect opportunity to dialogue and chart the institution’s desired future together. This in turn improves understanding of the organization’s vision, and fostering a sense of ownership of the strategic plan and belonging to the organization. Once all the stakeholders have owned the strategic plan, their vision will be raised and this will encourage them to reflect creatively on the strategic direction of the institution.

4. **Setting priorities**

   Strategic planning provides a framework for setting priorities and achieving competitive advantage. In this Modern world, it has become more and more difficult to plan everything one would wish to do. Strategic planning process gives stakeholders golden opportunity to make choices through a balanced decision-making, trade-offs across the system and consensus building process.

5. **Focus**

   An old adage states: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Strategic planning is primarily about defining where "there" is, a type of roadmap outlining the outcomes and results designed to be achieved throughout the journey.

6. **Efficiency**

   More resources do not necessarily stand for the best results. The way one uses these resources can lead to a different level of benefits. Strategic planning helps to match the needs and resources of the organization.
References