

# Effects of Formal Institutional Structure on Strategic Plan Implementation in Public Secondary Schools in Bahati Sub-County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Until now few researchers have focused on the effect of institutional structure on strategy implementation independently. Many have focused on institutional structure among other factors thus not giving a clear view of the importance of structure on implementation. Thus, this study aimed at investigating the effect of formalized institutional structure on strategic plan implementation in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study reviewed literature on formal institutional structures and discussed theories that relates to strategy implementation. Descriptive correlation research design was employed. Structured questionnaires were administered to respondents to collect primary data which the researcher relied on for this study. The study's population was derived from schools in Bahati sub-county. A census was conducted of all the 31 principals of the public secondary schools in the area. Data collected was analyzed with statistical package for social sciences. Descriptive statistics; proportions, percentages and measures of central tendencies, were used to analyze the data. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to establish the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. It was concluded that increased formalization fail in strategy implementation. It was recommended that the ministry of education should review public schools structures to enhance strategy implementation.*

**Keywords:** Institutional structure, Structure formalization, Strategy, Strategic planning, Strategy implementation.

## 1. Introduction

A strategic plan highlights processes undertaken in order to develop a range of strategies that will contribute to achieving the organizational direction [32]. It was aptly noted that strategic planning involves systematic process in which an organization assesses its basic reason for being, what its strengths and weaknesses are, and what opportunities and threats it might face in the immediate and foreseeable future [11]. The organization then uses this assessment to decide whether or not to make changes in what it does, how it does it, and with whom it interacts in order to fulfill its purpose. Strategic planning and thinking involves making choices and decisions about the long-term future of an organization [23].

The purpose of strategic planning is maintaining a favorable balance between an organization and its environment over the long run. It provides a systematic process for gathering information about the big picture and using it to establish a long-term direction and then translate that direction into specific goals, objectives, and actions. It blends futuristic thinking, objective analysis, and subjective evaluation of goals and priorities to chart a future course of action that will ensure the organization's vitality and effectiveness in the long run. The main focus of strategic planning is on the changing future not the past or the present. The process results in strategic plans that require implementation or implementation under the stewardship of strategic behavior norms [27].

The senior management plays a major role not only in the formulation, but in the implementation of the strategy [27]. Unlike strategy formulation, strategy implementation is often seen as something of a craft, rather than a science, and its research history has previously been described as fragmented and eclectic [21]. Strategic implementation is the action phase of the strategic management process. It is defined as

the process that turns strategic plans into a series of action tasks, and ensures that these tasks are executed in such a way that the objectives of the strategic plan are achieved.

Some governments have made it mandatory for schools to formulate strategic plans in line with the national strategic plan. The government of Australia has gone a step ahead and made a guideline of what schools should include in their strategic plan [28] and the United Kingdom government passed the 1988 Education Reform Act which gave the responsibility of planning to schools [13]. In 1989, the UK government put emphasis on the staff to develop their own priorities and come up with strategies to achieve them. Later the government used the strategic plans as focal points for national inspection framework [4]. This means that the teachers were required to show their achievements during routine inspections using parameters they had set in the strategic plans. The UK government did come up with a system of deriving targets for schools from the national targets set for different categories of schools [4].

Kenya is one of the countries, which signed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and one of the goals is Education For All (EFA) by year 2015 [26]. The achievement of these goals will depend on how well education programs are planned and implemented. This calls for preparation of a national education strategic plan upon which schools should base their strategic plans. The implementation of strategic plans involves three key activities; Developing short term objectives which are implementable, developing functional tactics, and policies that empower action [24]. A school that formulates and implements strategic plan derives benefits such as having negotiated and agreed clear goals and objectives, communication of the set goals to various stake holders, providing a base upon which progress can be measured, building strong and functional teams in management staff

who have clear vision on how the school will be in future, providing the school management with new ideas which can steer the school to greater heights of excellence and lastly commits the school funds to a well-organized and coherent development agenda [1].

There are many factors that influence the success of strategy implementation, ranging from the people who communicate or implement the strategy to the systems or mechanisms in place for co-ordination and control. A survey of executives from 200 global companies with sales of more than US \$500 million identified several inhibitors of strategy implementation [30]. This included lack of sufficient resources, poor communication of the strategy down the organization, organizational structure not being aligned to the strategy, reward incentives systems not being aligned to strategic goals and poor leadership by senior management. A lot of research has been done on factors affecting implementation of strategy but little research has been done to investigate effect of structural dimensions on the implementation of strategy globally and little or none has been done in Kenya and more specifically in Bahati sub-county, Nakuru County. Therefore this study sought to investigate the effect of formal institutional structure on strategic plan implementation in public secondary schools.

## 2. Problem Statement

Strategy implementation is the ultimate source of competitive advantage [34]. In spite of the importance of strategy implementation in organizations' success and the achievement of their goals, most of them fail to execute those strategies efficiently [29]. Public secondary schools in Kenya in following the ministries example have formulated strategic plans which form the basis of their operations. This is aimed at improving the performance and the achievement of the school's overall goals. Several factors influence the implementation of strategies and when a strategy is applied within an organization, it is expected to build a strong relationship between structure and strategy [7]. The chosen strategy determines which objectives will be realized, and which tasks will be executed to reach these goals, and how the work should be broken down. In other words, structure needs to follow the strategy, logically [2]. There are some studies on determining effect of strategy compilation on structure but the effect of structural dimensions on implementation of strategies has not been discussed, yet. On the other hand, most of the researchers have considered structure as one of the effective factors in strategy implementation, along with others, and some of them prioritized the effective factors and compared with the impact of structure. It is clear that in these studies the effect of structural dimensions are not evaluated independent of other factors, but they are relatively prioritized [15]. While structure follows strategy, there is also evidence that structure influences strategy in certain situations [7]. Therefore this study sought to examine the effect of formal structures on implementation of strategic plan.

## 3. Objective

To determine the effects of formalized school structures on implementation of strategic plan in public secondary schools.

## 4. Research Hypothesis

H<sub>01</sub>: Formalized school structures have no significant effect on implementation of strategic plan in public secondary schools.

## 5. Conceptual Framework

The researcher conceptualized a framework consisting of the dependent and independent variables. This was aimed at guiding the researcher in achievement of the research objective (establishing the effect of formal institutional structure on strategic plan implementation).

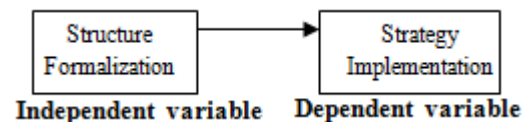


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

This framework shows structure formalization as the independent variable while strategy implementation is the dependent variable. The framework conceptualized that structure formalization influences strategy implementation.

## 6. Literature Review

The review will involve studies previously done on formal structures and strategy implementation, globally; regional and finally in Kenya.

### 6.1 Theoretical Literature

The study employed the Bourgeois and Brodwin five model strategy [5].

#### 6.1.1 Five-Model System for Strategy Implementation

Bourgeois and Brodwin created a five-model system for strategy implementation categorizing strategy implementation practices. It shows different positions or viewpoints one might assume while implementing strategy. The commander model draws its influences from the military life, in the sense that the CEO wields absolute power. In this model the CEO is the rational agent behind the strategy decisions and plays no role in implementation. The change model is based on planned interventions in the organization's structure and systems, which will set off the desired behavioral outcomes [5]. This model creates the ability to carry out more complicated strategic plans than the commander model, but also creates an additional inflexibility for unanticipated events and changes of plan. Both of the two models may suffer from motivation problems.

The collaborative model extends the power of strategic decision-making from the CEO to the organization's management team. This model helps to motivate the managers and also provides the strategic decision-making-process with more information and cognitive capital. The problem of this model results from the fact that collaboration does not reach beyond top management. More decision making also means more politics and conflicts of interest, which may mean less rationality. The cultural model is based on molding the organization's culture to ensure the acceptance of a shared vision. This model is based on all

organizational members' participating in decision making directed to perpetuate the vision. The main problem of this model is the vast amount of time it requires. It also presupposes an intelligent and responsible workforce and may lead to suppressing homogeneity in the organization [5].

The crecive model implies that strategic decisions are created bottom up by the organization's members and the role of the CEO is to act as judge and premise-setter and ensure an organizational context (structure, systems and culture) that will promote openness and innovation. The crecive model offers a rather tempting standpoint from an organization psychological perspective. It offers to make full use of the organizational members' knowledge and effort in the strategy process, encouraging participation [5]. This model is relevant to this study because it describes the characteristics of different administrative practices which are as a result of the type of the structure adopted by the school administration. The practice of formal structures will determine whether it follows the commander model, the change model, cultural model, collaborative model or the crecive model.

## 6.2 Empirical Literature Review

Organizational structure may create a barrier towards the implementation of a strategy if it is not properly designed. Under normal circumstances a structure is developed after a strategy and different jobs and tasks have been well defined. A structure assists the organization to identify the skills and competencies required for each job to be performed. Many studies have been conducted in regard to strategy implementation. This section will review empirical studies on structure formalization and strategy implementation.

### 6.2.1 Structure Formalization

According to Taggart and Mays (1987), formalization is 'the use of well-defined rules and regulations to govern the behavior of individuals so that actions within the organization become standardized. Formalization is comprised of both codification and observation [22]. Formally structured organizations tends to be more bureaucratic and are characterized by institutionalized rules, policies and routines, difficult integration across functions, less spontaneity and flexibility in its working which leads to behavior programming and strict enforcement of rules, thereby increasing predictability of performance [8]. The Classical school contends that complex organizations need to have a high degree of formalization.

However, while a formal organizational structure can be perceived as reflecting inhibition and inefficiency, it can also reflect order and stability [18]. It enhances clarity, transparency, objectivity; and when the task is less complex, stable and routine; formalization can also streamline decision-making process and thus improve efficiency and speed. Formalization is part of organizational control since its ultimate goal is to channel the productive behavior of workers and to limit harmful, arbitrary behaviors of both employees and supervisors [20]. Formalization helps employees become more efficient which increases their motivation, which ultimately leads to increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Well-

delineated, clear rules also allow employees to carry out their tasks with confidence. Formalization allows employees to engage in quality work, which raises their self-esteem. Nevertheless, a review of the literature on the characteristics of organizational structures and innovation in general gives a sense that innovation is more favored by informal rather than formal organizational structures [20]. As a result of embedded formalized roles and routines, functional silos, and administration by managers insulated by multiple bureaucratic layers from the changing realities of the marketplace, large, mature organizations often have difficulty responding to environmental turbulence [15]. In contrast, new ventures in emerging sectors initially lack formalized roles and routines and are small, flexible, and innovative; their employees and founding team have frequent interactions with customers. Formalized organizational roles reduce work ambiguity, enable individual focus, learning, and decision making, decrease the cost of coordination, and increase efficiency [25], all outcomes of vital importance for new ventures with meager resources.

### 6.2.2 Strategy implementation

Strategy implementation is an integral component of the strategic management process and is viewed as the process that turns the formulated strategy into a series of actions and then results to ensure that the vision, mission, strategy, and strategic objectives of the organization are successfully achieved as planned [33]. Strategy implementation has received increasing attention in literature [3]. Strategy implementation involves iterative work of taking action, reconciling and adapting organizational dimensions to a strategy; experimenting ways to effectively execute the strategy and managing strategy to fit the environment, which then leads to increased performance [17]. The problem to strategy implementation is related to somewhere in the middle of this strategy-to-performance gap, with a more likely source being a gap in the formulation-to-implementation process [5].

In the volatile contemporary business environment, characterized by high levels of uncertainty, turbulence and discontinuous change, a formulated strategy may be obsolete by the time it has been implemented [35]. Therefore, strategy formulated must take into account the means by which it will be implemented, and it is only through its implementation that a strategy can be refined and reformulated [14]. Unless key individuals and groups, within and outside the organization, accept the rationale for strategic change; any proposed implementation will be suboptimal at best [16]. Effective communication systems are needed in implementing strategy to make sure that everyone within the organization shares the vision, mission, objectives and values and has a good grasp of the strategy and how it relates to their own efforts [16]. Multi-channel flows of communication are helpful in creating a shared sense of ownership of corporate strategy. In order to facilitate the successful implementation of strategy, effective top management teams recognize the importance of considering strategy implementation issues during the formulation of strategy [12]. In this regard, strategy formulation and strategic control that do not take into account the problems associated with the implementation of these strategies run the risk of being ineffective.

There is clearly reported in the white paper of strategy implementation of Chinese corporation in 2006 that strategy implementation has become a great challenge for the management of all kinds of organizations. The survey also described that out of 100% surveyed organizations 83% organizations fail in implementation of their strategy smoothly and only 17% organizations were successful in implementation. Implementation of the strategic plan is more important than formulation; otherwise it is nothing more than a well-documented piece of paper in an organization [19].

Effective strategy implementation has never been more important in the contemporary results-driven business environment. The real value of strategic management lies in its implementation [35]. Strategies formulated and not implemented serve little purpose and even the best formulated strategy is competitively irrelevant if it is not effectively implemented [3]. However, research indicates that most organizations fail to implement their strategies effectively. More than half of the leaders surveyed in a recent study perceived a gap between their organizations ability to formulate and communicate sound strategies and their ability to implement this strategies. A further 64% of the respondents did not have complete confidence that their organizations would be able to bridge the gap between the formulation of strategy and the effective implementation of the strategy [19].

## 7. Research Methodology

The research methodology provides a detailed discussion of the research design, location of the study, population, and data collection procedure and data analysis. The study employed a descriptive co-relational research design. The purpose of research design is to achieve greater control of the study and to improve the validity of the study by examining the research problem [6]. This study sought to obtain descriptive and self-reported information from the principals in public secondary schools. The design allows the researcher to expose the respondents to a set of questions to allow comparison. The target population of the study included the principals of all the public secondary schools in Bahati sub-county. The sub-county has a total of 31 schools each with one principal. The study adopted a census where all the 31 principals in the public secondary schools were taken as respondents. A census was found to be appropriate since the population involved was no too big to be sampled. The study used structured questionnaires that were distributed to all the principals.

Reliability and validity was established for standardization of the structured questionnaires that was used in the study. Piloting of the instruments was done to assist the researcher in testing both the validity and reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's coefficient Alpha was computed for the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.81 was established and deemed to reflect the internal reliability of the instruments. This was in line with the assertion that a Cronbach coefficient Alpha of 0.7 and above is appropriate [10]. The instrument was taken for piloting in a neighboring subukia sub-county whose population is similar to the target population. Ten principals from schools in Subukia sub-county were chosen for piloting. Content validity of the

research instrument was established in order to make sure that it reflects the content of the concepts (organizational structure and strategy implementation) in question.

### 7.1 Data processing and analysis

Data collected was processed and analyzed based on the objectives and research hypotheses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. This was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, and means) presented in tables were used to organize and summarize data and to describe the characteristics of the sample while Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test all hypotheses.

### 7.2 Research Findings

The study involved a census of 31 principals of public secondary schools in Bahati Sub-county. The researcher administered questionnaires to 31 respondents. 27 of them filled and returned the questionnaires. This represented 87.09% response rate.

#### 7.2.1 Structure Formalization

Regarding how formalization of the structure influences the operations of the school. The findings of the study are as shown in table below.

**Table 1: Structure Formalization**

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>	<i>CoV</i>
Formal structures govern operations	1	4	1.74	0.813	47%
Formal structures enhance order and stability	1	5	3.56	1.311	37%
Formal structures enhance transparency in the school	1	4	1.85	0.77	42%
Formal structures has streamlined decision making in the school	1	4	1.78	0.751	42%
Structure formalization increased teachers efficiency	1	4	1.67	0.832	50%
Structure formalization enhanced teachers creativity in service delivery	1	4	1.67	0.784	47%
Structure formalization has enabled the school to adapt to change	1	4	1.7	0.775	46%

N=27

The findings indicated that almost all the responses were inclined towards the mean of 2.0 interpreted as disagree from questionnaires coding. It suggests that respondents generally did not think that formal structures necessarily were important in management of the school. The standard deviations of all but one of the responses as shown in the table above are less than 1.000. This implies that there was greater agreement in the way the respondents answered the questionnaire as regards to the aspects of formalization. The assertion that structure formalization enhances teachers' efficiency had the largest coefficient of variation (CoV) of 50%. This shows how diverse the respondents' opinions were from the mean. Thus the respondents were not in agreement in their opinions on this matter.

### 7.2.3 Strategy Implementation

The researcher intended to determine the progress of strategy implementation in public secondary schools in Bahati Sub-county. The responses in this case were also in form of a Likert scale and as such could be combined into a single composite mean score. The results are as tabulated below.

**Table 2: Strategy implementation**

	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	CoV
Strategy implementation decisions are based on strategic plan	1	4	1.93	0.874	45%
School has measurable performance standards for each plan element	2	5	4.11	0.641	16%
Key stakeholders accepted the rationale for strategy change	1	4	2.04	0.94	46%
For strategy implementation the school has effective communication systems	1	4	2.11	1.013	48%
The school has organized performance standard monitoring for implementation	1	4	1.85	0.907	49%
A gap exist between schools' ability to formulate and implement sound strategy	2	5	3.89	0.892	23%
The school has allocated sufficient resources for strategy implementation	1	4	2.04	0.854	42%

N=27

The table shows that a majority of the responses inclined towards a mean of 2.00 (Disagree). A majority of these responses had a standard deviation of less than 1.000. Thus it appears that there was less disparity in the opinions of the respondents in regard to these aspects of strategy implementation. However it was noted that the aspect of school having set measurable performance standards for each plan element had the least standard deviation of 0.641. This indicated that the respondents tended to be in agreement in their response to this aspect. Greater coefficient of variation was noted on the aspect of the school having an organized performance standard monitoring system for implementation which was 49% given that its mean was 1.85. This indicated that a majority of the responses were not in agreement regarding the same matter.

### 7.2.4 Effect of structure formalization on strategic plan implementation

In respect to this variable, all the responses were on a Likert scale. This implied that the responses could viably be consolidated into a composite score of their means in order to infer to the relationship between structure formalization and strategy implementation. The analysis was carried by use of Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings of the analysis are presented in Table below.

**Table 3: Effect of formalized school structure on implementation of strategic plan**

	formalization	Implementation
Formalization	1	-.885**
		0
	27	27
Implementation	-.885**	1
	0	
	27	27

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

According to the findings, there exists a strong negative relationship ( $r = -0.885$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between structure formalization and strategy implementation. This implies that formalization has an inverse relationship i.e. it affects strategy implementation negatively. More specifically, increased level of structure formalization leads to the weakening of the ability to implement strategic plans. These findings imply that the first hypothesis  $H_{01}$  that formalized school structures have no effect on strategy implementation in public secondary schools was rejected.

## 8. Summary

Descriptive statistics showed on average that increased formalization does not facilitate the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools. This is evidenced by the fact that most of the respondents tended to disagree with the aspects of formalization registering on average a mean of 2.00 (Disagree). The researcher noted that most of the respondents were of the view that formal structures impacted negatively on the running of the school straining transparency, decision making, efficiency, creativity and adaptability to change. This findings were in tandem with assertion that formally structured organizations tends to be more bureaucratic and are characterized by institutionalized rules, policies and routines, difficult integration across functions, less spontaneity and flexibility in its working which leads to behavior programming and strict enforcement of rules, thereby increasing predictability of performance [8].

However, most of the respondents were of the view that formal structures enhanced order and stability in the running of the schools. This was in agreement with the observation that while a formal organizational structure can be perceived as reflecting inhibition and inefficiency, it can also reflect order and stability [18]. It was also noted that most of the respondents did not believe that formal structures governed the operations of their schools registering a mean of 1.74 which is inclined towards 2.00 (Disagree). The findings of inferential statistics showed a negative correlation between structure formalization and strategic plan implementation. This showed that structure formalization affected strategy implementation negatively indicating that increased formalization strained strategy implementation.

## 9. Conclusions

The researcher concluded that for effectiveness in strategic plan implementation, rigid formal structures should be discouraged for they were found to be ineffective. The researcher also concludes that even though formalized structures are recommended to all the public schools by the ministry, most schools have not been following the formalized structures to the fullest as most respondents disagreed that formal structures governed their school's operations.

## 10. Recommendations

After drawing the aforementioned conclusions the researcher deemed it rational to put across a number of recommendations. The researcher recommends that the

ministry of education should review the public secondary school structure to come up with the right structure that would enhance strategic plan implementation in the schools. The school's administration should also embrace different structures other than formalization in order to improve in strategy implementation.

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