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STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE OF ACCREDITED UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

The extensiveness, intensity and formality of a strategic planning process in an organization may have an effect on the organization performance. The degree and direction of this effect still remains an unresolved management concern due to lack of consensus in research findings. This indicates that, there are other possible factors that may influence the relationship necessitating further empirical investigations. Every organization has unique characteristics like age, ownership and size, which define and differentiate it from other organizations in the same industry and these may have a bearing on the relationship between strategic planning process and organization performance. The population of interest was all accredited universities in Kenya as at November 2016. The findings indicate that age, size and ownership structure are statistically significant moderators for the relationship between strategic planning process and growth performance of accredited universities in Kenya while size and age are statistically significant moderators for the relationship between strategic planning process and ranking performance of accredited universities in Kenya. The study recommends that, as universities endeavor to use the strategic planning process as a management tool to enhance performance, they must consider their unique characteristics which will enhance or hinder their planning efforts

Key words: Strategic planning process, Organization characteristics, Accredited universities, Kenya

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Introduction

Strategic planning process looks at the formality of the process in which formal procedures are used, specific formats followed, there is quantification of all inputs into objective measures and there are rigid calendar of events to be followed to attain a set mission (Prahalad, 1983; Chavunduka, Chimunhu, & Sifile 2015). In addition it looks at the intensity with which organizations engage in the strategic planning process which focuses on management emphasis on the process, the perceived importance attached to the process, the inclusiveness of all stakeholders into the process and the emphasis laid in the variables of planning process (Leontiades & Tezel, 1980; Burnside, 2002; Ranasinghe, 2010; Chavunduka et al., 2015)

The effect of strategic planning process on organization performance still remains an unresolved issue with some studies indicating that strategic planning has a positive impact on organizational performance (Desai, 2000; Arasa & K'Obonyo, 2011; Karabulut & Efindiougu, 2010; Namada, 2013); other studies find negative relationship between planning and performance (Leontacles & Tezel, 1980; Robinson & Pearce, 1983) while Thune and Green (1992) indicate that planning and performance have a non-directional relationship. Miller and Cardinal (1994) contend that explicit strategies are dysfunctional as they channel attention and behavior to specific plans thereby driving out important innovations and creativity. The lack of consensus indicates that, there are other possible factors that may influence its relationship and performance necessitating further empirical investigations (Filatotchev et al., 2016).

Every organization has unique characteristics which define and differentiate it from other organizations in the same industry. Organizational characteristics are features and attribute that can be associated to a specific organization which include but are not limited to; size, ownership structure, financial resources, product and service lines, and the age of the organization (Wang, 2009) and are drawn from the internal side of an organization (Penrose, 1959). Wiklund and Shepherd (2005) in their study find that organizations that align their organizational attributes with the environment characteristics outperform those that don't. Equally unique organizational characteristics can be a source of contextual obstacles to an organizations effort to improve performance (Pucko & Cater 2013). These unique characteristics may have a bearing the relationship between strategic planning process and organization performance.

The conceptualization that strategic planning process has possible effect on the performance of an organization and that this relationship may be moderated by unique organization characteristics is supported by the postulations of contingency theory. Contingent perspective is where the influence of a given variable would not be universal but rather depend on the level of another intervening variable (Miller, 1988; Snow & Hrebiniak, 1980). Zsolt (2012) argues that contingency theory may be intra and extra organizational while Dobak (2006) says that different solutions are effective for an organization in varying circumstances and this is more appropriate than having universal management principle for all organizations. Its main emphasis is that performance outcomes of a business are dependent on combination of factors whether internal or external that has a direct and indirect influence on it. Managerial solutions are therefore contingent on the factors impinging on the situation at hand. Tasks are not routine and there is a need to make decisions based on the circumstances of each unique situation.

Kenya national philosophy and the Vision 2030 places education at the center of its human and economic development strategies with higher education enlisting Kenya as an internationally competitive nation (Ministry of Education, 2012). The evolving nature of the higher education sector characterized by ranking both locally and internationally, focusing on the diverse needs of stakeholders; quality of research, publications and infrastructure, continued improvement of programs offered, transition rate and skills of the faculty members has increased competition (Commission for University education (CUE), 2015). Kenya has a total of 70 accredited universities (CUE, 2016) comprising of public universities, private universities, constituent colleges of public and private universities and institutions with letters of interim authority. Some are old, others new and young, some are large others are small and these unique characteristics may have a possible effect on the relationship between strategic planning process and performance of these universities.

Materials

Strategic planning is used as a management tool for ensuring organization members are working towards same goal and are accurately adjusting to environmental changes. It has been hypothesized that organizations that consciously plan, influence market forces positively to lead to a competitive advantage, enhancing effectiveness and consequently improving performance (Schrieffer, 1995). Planning intensity is the amount of effort put in the process of planning, which is operationalized by amount of information generated plus the intensity of analyzing and evaluating it (Chavunduka et al., 2015). Formality of the plan is extent to which objectives are stated explicitly and strategies expressed in written documents (Aosa, 1992; Boyne, 2001; Arasa, 2008; Odundo, 2012). Burnside (2002) two approaches used to operationalize formality are; assesses measuring the extensiveness of planning process or measures perceived importance. Organizational characteristics are features and attribute that can be associated to a specific organization and drawn from the internal side of the organization (Penrose, 1959).

Research by Zheka (2005) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1980) find that ownership structure has an impact on the corporate governance, power and investor perceptions. Ownership structure is an appreciation of who finances the operations of an organization, whether government for public or individual investors for private. There is an association between organizational size and inertia, defined as slow adaptation to change or resistance to fundamental changes in conducting business (Hendricks, 2001; Schonhr, 2008; Cater &

Pucko, 2013). For Miller and Chen (1994) inertia can be caused by constraints on action associated with organizational age and size. According to liability of senescence (Baum, 1992; Hannan, 1998) older organizations are highly inertial and tend to become increasingly ill-suited to cope with changing competitive environment due to established structures and rigid strategic plans.

Size is one of the most acknowledged determinants of a financial performance (Beard & Dess, 1981) with larger organizations more likely to have output levels close to their industry minimum efficient scale (Audretsch & Mahmood, 1994; Silviano; 2008). Min and Galle (2001) assert that adoption of an innovation; especially technological innovation within organization might be positively related to the organizational size to which Schonhrr (2008) concurs. This implies that larger the organization have greater benefits from implementation of an innovation due to increased chances that the innovation investment will be recovered contrary to small ones who perceive innovation as a heavy burden having no competitive advantage (Rastislar, 2016).

According to McGahan (1999), thirty six percent of industry variance in profitability could be attributed to unique organization characteristics and actions. Organizations plan and implement various strategies in order to create a competitive advantage and outperform competitors by creating more value depending on the stock of resources they have and distinctive capability to use the resources (Besanto et al., 2003). Characteristics like age which comes with experience and the size and or ownership structure of an organization, which may translate into how much resource base an organization has accumulated, might have an effect on the process of strategic planning that a firm can engage in in terms of how extensively and intensively the planning process will be.

Contingency theory (Lawrence & Lorsh, 1967) contends that there is no one best way to manage all organizations due to the differentiated needs that are unique to different customer groups hence organizations need to offer customized products and services. The design of the organization and its subsystems must fit between themselves to enable decision making capturing strategy, structure, size, environment, task and individuals (Fiedler, 1964: Vroom & Yetton, 1973). As a theory, it study's organization behavior and gives explanations on how contingent factors influence the design and function of organizations. The constant increase in demand for and access to higher education for training professionals to facilitate this economic growth, in an increasingly competitive global environment, has led to a need for sustainable competitive advantage that addresses all stakeholder needs at the universities.

Methods

This study is anchored in the positivist philosophical orientation as it is founded on theory. It is largely involved in theory testing, and it seeks to respond to research hypotheses and empirically establishing a link among study variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2004; 2006). The key idea of positivism is that the social world exists externally and its properties should be measured objectively rather than being inferred subjectively (Creswell, 2012). The study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey design where data were collected across universities in Kenya at one point in time helping the researcher establish whether significant association exist among variables at such point in time (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Nachmias & Nachmias, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2003) leading to study conclusion and recommendations.

The population of interest for this study was all 70 accredited universities in Kenya (CUE, 2016) which enabled comparison between public owned and private, new and old universities as well as large and small giving a dynamic view of the entire sector. Primary data on the formality and intensity of the strategic planning process as well as the size of university was collected using a questionnaire administered to the university registrar planning through the "drop and pick later" method. Secondary data on university performance, age and ownership structure was collected from the MoEST reports, CUE reports and international web ranking reports. Data was analyzed using regression analysis to establish the effect of size, age and ownership on the relationship between strategic planning process and growth and on ranking performance of universities

$\mathbf{P = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21}X_{21} + \beta_{22}X_{22} + \beta_{23}XZ + \varepsilon;}$ Where; P= University Performance; β_{20}, β_{21}, β_{22}, β_{23} =Coefficients; X_{21}= strategic planning process; X_{22}= Organization Characteristics; XZ=Interaction term (strategic planning process * university characteristics); ε=Error Term

Hayes, Glynn and Huge (2012) state that an interaction effect describes a situation in which the effect of an independent variable on dependent variable is conditional upon the value of another third variable. The interaction term (XZ) measures the extent to which the relationship between independent and dependent variable depends on other independent variables. If the coefficient β_{23} is significant, then the two predictors have an interactive effect on the outcome variables. If it is not significant, then the predictors only have independent effect and not interaction effect on the dependent variable. To test for moderation; first test the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable which should be confirmed statistically significant. Then using stepwise multiple regression analysis, test for the multiple relationship between independent variable, moderating variable, interaction term and dependent variable which should be statistically significant and in addition to model being significant, the interaction term should also be statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

Results

University characteristics include age, size, and ownership structure which distinguish one university from another in Kenya. The age of the university is the number years the institution has been in existence since it was established and this was got from the CUE website (CUE, 2016). To enable comparisons, the universities age were categorized into five groups ranging from the youngest and most new that are below two years since they were established to the oldest universities that have been in operation for more than fifteen years. The results indicated that forty percent of universities were above 15 years since establishment with only 7.5% being younger than two years. This may indicate that majority of the universities already have established processes.

The university ownership structure was categorized as either public or private depending on whether the Kenya government financed part of university operations or not in the previous years. The public universities and their constituent colleges were considered public while private universities, their constituent colleges and Institutions with letters of interim authority were considered private. 60% of the universities were public universities while 40% were private universities.

The size of the university was computed using the total number of students enrolled per academic year alongside the total number of employees in the university on permanent, contract and casual terms. The study assumption is that the university only increases the number of employees commensurate to the level of student enrollment in line with their core mandate of operation. The results indicate that 17.5% were considered very small, 57.5% were considered small, medium and large while 25% were considered very large.

The findings indicate a statistically significant direct relationship between strategic planning process and growth ($F=2.605$, $p=0.047$ and $R^2=.303$) and with ranking ($F=1.995$, $p=0.033$ and $R^2=0.218$) performance of accredited universities in Kenya. Higgins (2005) view firm characteristics as having an influence on organizational behavior and also on the choice of strategy hence are capable of not only influencing but also driving performance; Kipesha (2013) in a study of microfinance institutions in Tanzania finds that size and age have a significant impact on their performance in terms of efficiency, sustainability, profitability and revenue generation capacity while Efendioglu and Karabulut (2010) find that firm level factors and performance of firms have a relationship that is not significant.

On moderation effect of age on strategic planning process and growth, it is statistically significant at 95% confidence level with R value of 0.564. 41% of variation in the growth of universities can be explained by strategic planning process, age and the interaction between strategic planning process and age of the university. The interaction term has a significant t-value indicating that age is a significant moderator between strategic planning process and university growth performance. The results on possible moderation effect of age on the relationship between strategic planning process and the ranking performance is statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

This compares to Cadogan, Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2005) who argue that as firms become older and more experienced, they tend to be more bureaucratic and inflexible posing challenge to dynamism but also have more capabilities in their operations due to experience. Similarly as universities age, their research experience builds and they have better established and grounded publications which impact ranking positively. However for some universities their age is not commensurate with their growth rate with some older universities having very

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low growth and some younger having higher growth and this may be attributed to creativity in younger and less bureaucratic universities enabling growth.

The size of the university was tested for possible moderation effect of the relationship between strategic planning process and growth and ranking performance of universities. Results indicate that size is a statistically significant moderator of the relationship between strategic planning process and growth of universities at R-value of 0.653. 42% of the variation in university growth is explained by strategic planning process, size and interaction term. The t-value for the interaction term is statistically significant at 95% confidence level. Testing for strategic planning process, size and interaction term predicting university ranking performance it is statistically significant as indicated by the F-value that is significant at 95% confidence level. The t-values for the strategic planning process, size and the interaction term are statistically significant hence size is a statistically significant moderator for university ranking performance

The larger the university, the better the performance since as the university increases the number of staff in different specializations, the more it is able to enhance its research improving its ranking performance. This is in line with the findings of Onyango (2012) and Czinkota and Johnson (1983) that size which is measured as the number of employees in an organization has a significant positive influence on performance of the organization. Spanos et al., (2004) in a study of Greek manufacturing firms finds that firm specific factors explain more than twice of the variation in firms as industry factors do. The findings however contradict those of Njeru (2013) who finds that size and age of an organization have no significant relationship to performance as Shinkle et. al., (2010) find a negative relationship between size and performance of organizations while Karabag and Berggren (2013) in a study of Turkey large manufacturing firms find that firm related factors did not significantly influence performance.

Results on the possible moderation effect of ownership structure on the relationship between strategic planning process and growth of universities is statistically significant with R value of 0.624. 38% of the variation in university growth is explained by the predictor variables. The t-value for the interaction term is statistically significant at 95% confidence level. Further, findings show that strategic planning process, ownership and interaction term as predictors of university ranking performance is not statistically significant as indicated by the F-value that is not significant and R value of below 0.3. The t-values for the strategic planning process, ownership and the interaction term are not statistically significant hence ownership structure of the university is not a statistically significant moderator for the relationship between strategic planning process and university ranking performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

Table 1: Moderation effect of University Characteristics on the relationship between strategic planning process and performance of accredited universities in Kenya

	F-Value	p-value	R	Conclusion
Age/Growth	5.609	.003	.419	Significant
Age/Ranking	1.228	.050	.293	Significant
Size/Growth	8.928	.000	.427	Significant
Size/Ranking	3.869	.001	.028	Significant
Ownership/Growth	7.638	0	.389	Significant
Ownership/Ranking	.398	.755	.032	Not Significant

Conclusion

The age, size and ownership structure of the Accredited University have statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between strategic planning process and their performance. The older a university is, the more it is formal in its planning process as it has intensified its planning process while the larger the university, the higher the chances it may have more resources to commit to the strategic planning process. Best practices over the years are adopted enhancing the performance of universities. Advancement in age and size will also make universities more rigid since they have developed processes which they believe must work hence not open to new ideas and the large bureaucracies are also unable to easily adjust to emerging changes since very rigid in their structure and systems hence a need to balance formality and flexibility.

As the university advances in age, they acquire a reserve of knowledge on strategic planning process about what works for them and what does not as well as reserves of expertise. The larger the university, the larger the resource base and the capacity to have an intense and elaborate strategic planning process. The ownership structure of a university will determine the inclusiveness and extensiveness of the strategic planning process a university is able to engage in where public institutions may be more open since they are government owned while private ones may be more reserved on inclusion of different stakeholders in the strategic planning process.

Implications

The growth of universities as impacted by their age, size and ownership structure is a focus point for university management. Some relatively old universities are still very small in size and this requires management to address the challenges they may be facing. Enrollment rates at the Kenya universities highly differ from the completion rate in the same institutions especially in the large universities which indicates possible challenges to the students between the beginnings of their program to its successful completion. Management needs to look into these challenges in the system or otherwise and address them which may be as a result of the formal structures and systems developed over the years.

The degree of formality of the strategic planning process at the university has an adverse effect on their performance because it leaders them rigid. There is need for management at the university to enhance a balance between the degree of formality and the need for flexibility to allow for innovative approaches. A few private universities have their strategic plan document in the custody of the respective division and it is only availed on demand. For stakeholders to be on board about where the university envisions itself in future, it is important that management avails this document and receives feedback on areas of needed improvement where necessary.

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