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Enhancing Employee Engagement and Participation in Strategic Planning among Public Sectors in Tanzania

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Abstract:
Engaging employees in the strategic planning process is essential for the successful implementation of strategic objectives in the public sector globally and in Africa in particular. A number of studies have been carried out to rationalise the importance of employees' engagement in the strategic planning process. Nevertheless, there was a scarcity of studies that investigated the strategies used by public organisations to ensure the active participation of employees in the strategic planning process. The current study filled the gap by examining strategies employed by public organisations to ensure the engagement and Participation of employees in the Strategic Planning Among Public Sectors in Tanzania. The study was carried out in Dar-es-Salaam region, Tanzania, involving 20 participants selected through purposive and convenient sampling techniques from public sectors. Interviews were used to collect field data, which were analysed thematically, and the themes emerged. All research ethics principles were observed during data collection, including seeking participation consent from participants and ensuring participants' information is kept confidential. From the analysis, the findings indicated a number of strategies employed by public sectors in Tanzania to ensure the engagement and participation of employees in the strategic planning process. They identified strategies that include participatory workshops, task forces and committees, and training and development. Others are feedback mechanisms and clear communication channels, performance management alignment and incentives, and continuous improvements. The study findings conclude that engagement and participation of employees in the strategic planning process is essential and that the identified strategies used by public sectors in Tanzania create a more inclusive and participatory strategic planning process, leading to better alignment, engagement, and successful implementation of strategic initiatives.

Keywords: Employees engagement and participation, strategic planning, public sector

1. Introduction

Strategic planning can be described as organisations' process of streamlining its strategy and creating a set of allocated resources to support this. Strategic planning has also been named as "synonymous with responsible and accountable management" (Kenny, 2006). The concept and practice of strategic planning have been embraced worldwide and across sectors because of its perceived contribution to organisational effectiveness. Today, organisations from both the private and public sectors have taken the practice of strategic planning seriously as a tool that can be utilised to fast-track their performances. Strategic planning is arguably an important ingredient in the conduct of strategic management. It is the first phase in the strategic management process, with strategy implementation, evaluation and control completing this process. Steiner (1979) noted that the framework for formulating and implementing strategies is the formal strategic planning system. It could be said, therefore, that strategic planning forms a backbone of support for the strategic management process.

The earlier period of adoption of strategic planning was characterised by a relatively stable business environment, and strategic planning was heavily drawn from past experience and extended budgeting. The successful embracement of strategic planning then could be attributed to this stability in the business environment. However, James and Ag (1984) contend that the business lessons of the 1960s and 1970s were no longer valid in the succeeding periods as traditional strategic management concepts were inadequate to cope with the emerging and dynamic business environment. James and Ag further argue that management's task had grown exponentially, and managers needed to acquire, process and apply new knowledge related to technological shifts, changing dynamics of the marketplace, expectations and quality of human resources, environmental values, increased state intervention and information explosion. Strategic concepts originally linked to growth were incapable of coping with the changing business environment, and therefore, the emphasis shifted to survival. There was general dissatisfaction with strategic planning in the 1970s and 1980s, and various writers levelled criticisms against the practice mainly because the general stability and predictability that characterised the earlier period was gone. However, Porter (1985) noted that despite the criticism, strategic planning was still useful, and it only needed to be improved and recast, a sentiment which was echoed by Aosa (1992). It is because of its perceived importance as essential to effective organisational performance that, as a concept and practice, strategic planning has evolved over the years and is increasingly getting recognised and adopted worldwide and across sectors. Greenley (1986) noted that

strategic planning has potential advantages and intrinsic values that eventually translate into improved firm performance. It is, therefore, a vehicle that facilitates improved firm performance.

However, it has been argued that for strategic planning to translate into the expected results, a facilitative internal environment and culture must be present. Yavas, Kagnak and Dilber (1985) postulate that managerial attitudes determine both the performance and effectiveness of management functions when such organisational characteristics as size and technology are held constant. The strategic planning process introduces changes, some of which encounter organisational resistance. Ansoff and McDonnell (1990) argue that this hinders effective strategy implementation. To manage the anticipated resistance, Ansoff and McDonnell recommend an interactive strategy formulation process, which involves the decision-makers together with staff in a step-by-step process of strategy analysis and decision-making. This approach takes into cognisance the fact that managers and staff not only make important contributions to strategy formulation but are also the principal agents of its implementation. Supporting this view, Yavas, Kagnak and Dilber (1985) argue that the culture of staff involvement in matters affecting them at individual, group and corporate levels influences staff productivity and overall corporate performance.

Aosa (1992) observes that staff involvement is crucial for planning and strategy development. Workers need to know the organisation's goals and their expected role towards achieving the same, and getting them involved in the decision facilitates this. Summers and Hyman (2005) note that employers seek productive efficiency and recognise that the means to this is increasingly locked in the head of the people they employ. They argue that employee participation in the organisation's strategic decision-making process enlists their commitment and desire to contribute to the realisation of the corporate goals. Adding to the above views, Thompson and Strickland (1989) postulate that galvanising organisation-wide commitment to the chosen strategic plan is critical for effective performance, and this can be achieved by creating a strategy-supportive work environment and corporate culture. They further argue that general managers must lead the way by not only conceiving bold new strategies but also by translating their strategic vision into concrete steps that get things done. Supporting this view, Taylor (1995) notes that it is desirable to have leadership that will spearhead the management of radical change with the aim of achieving dramatic improvement in performance by effectively communicating the new vision and building a new culture in which the staff can feel more involved, a culture that stands for quality, service and innovation.

Strategic planning plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of public sectors. Abdullah (2000) suggested that strategic planning helps align the goals and objectives of public sector organisations with the broader mission and vision of the government. It ensures that the strategies and actions undertaken by public sector entities are in line with the overall direction and priorities set by policymakers. Further, Ansoff (1970) argues that with limited resources at their disposal, public sector organisations need to make wise decisions regarding resource allocation. Strategic planning enables them to allocate resources effectively by identifying priorities, assessing needs, and setting realistic targets. This helps optimise the use of resources and ensures that key programs and initiatives receive adequate funding and support. Speaking on the importance of strategic planning for the public sector, Ansoff and McDonnell (1990) insisted that strategic planning establishes performance measures and indicators that allow public sector organisations to track progress and evaluate their effectiveness. Setting clear objectives and defining key performance indicators makes it easier to assess the impact of policies, programs and projects. Regular monitoring and evaluation facilitate course correction and improve decision-making.

Moreover, Bett (2003) adds that public sector organisations face numerous risks when implementing policies and delivering services. Strategic planning helps identify and assess these risks, enabling proactive measures to mitigate them. By considering potential challenges and developing contingency plans, public sector entities can respond more effectively to emergencies, crises, and unforeseen circumstances. Strategic planning fosters organisational alignment and coordination within the public sector. It encourages different departments and agencies to work together towards common goals, reducing duplication of efforts and enhancing synergy. This integrated approach improves efficiency, effectiveness, and the overall delivery of services to the public. Furthermore, Public sector organisations often have long-term goals and endure beyond individual political cycles. Strategic planning enables them to adopt a long-term perspective, ensuring a consistent and coherent approach to policy formulation and implementation. It helps promote continuity and stability in the delivery of public services, regardless of changes in leadership or other external factors. Strategic planning is essential for public sector effectiveness as it aligns goals, optimises resource allocation, measures performance, manages risks, and facilitates organisational alignment.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of engaging employees in the process of strategic planning, a lot of barriers have been identified that affect the engagement process. Blasi, Kruse, and Bernstein (2003) argue that there are several barriers that may impact employee engagement in the process of strategic planning globally, particularly in Africa. However, Bryson and Millward (1997) suggest that it is important to note that the specific barriers can vary across different organisations and countries globally, and Africa in particular, despite the fact that there are some common barriers that can hinder employee engagement in strategic planning.

Arguing on the same, Caeldries (1988) identified that organisations in Africa are experiencing poor communication between management and employees, which leads to a lack of clarity about the strategic planning process and its objectives. Chakravarthy (1986) suggests that employees in most of the public organisations in the e sub-Sahara region are not informed about the purpose of strategic planning or their role in it; they may feel disconnected and disengaged. Hierarchical organisational culture is another factor observed to suffocate public organisations when it comes to the engagement of employees in strategic planning. A study by Bett (2003) shows that Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa have a hierarchical culture with top-down decision-making processes that do not encourage employee participation or input. The study argues that this discourages employees from actively engaging in strategic planning and limits their

sense of ownership. Limited employee involvement has also been mentioned as another characteristic of strategic planning in public organisations. The study by Bett (2003) shows that employees in the public sector in Kenya and Tanzania reported being excluded from the strategic planning process, which makes them feel undervalued or disengaged. According to Hooper and Potter (2000), in most African public organisations, decision-making is often centralised at the top, leaving little room for input from other levels of the organisation.

Considering the importance that strategic planning plays for the effectiveness of organisation and the need to engage different stakeholders during preparation and execution, the current study focus is to explore different strategies that can be employed by the public sector to engage employees in the process of strategic planning (Bryson, 1989).

2. Literature Reviews

Many scholars emphasised the need for empirical studies about strategic planning participants and their impact. For example, Jamal and Getz (1996) stated that there is a scarcity of attention to strategic planning participants and a strong need for empirical studies in this field. They stressed the need to study the level and "concomitant issue of diffusion of power from the top management to other levels" (Jamal & Getz, 1996). Vilà and Canales (2008) emphasised a clear need to enlighten how strategy-making enhances the awareness about strategy among the members of the organisation. To explain strategic planning participants' relations with strategy implementation, their impact on the use of management tools is studied. The selection of suitable management tools is an essential managerial decision that should support and implement organisational strategy. Explaining the involvement of participants from different positions may have a significant influence on the selection of management tools. Regarding their roles, work assignments and personal experiences, they may use various management tools to implement the strategy.

2.1. Why Engagement of Employees in Strategic Planning

Several studies have been carried out to show the need and importance of engaging employees in the process of strategic planning. Howe (1986) insisted that engaging employees in strategic planning is crucial for the success of any organisation. It continues that when employees are involved in the planning process, they feel a sense of ownership and commitment towards the organisation's goals. Hussey (1984) argued that one outcome of employees' engagement is that clear communication between managers and employees is enhanced. Strategic planning helps to communicate to employees why strategic planning is vital for the organisation's success. It explains how their contributions will impact the future and emphasises the benefits of their involvement. Further, strategic planning paints a compelling vision of the future, showing employees how their work fits into the bigger picture (Hussey, 1990). Help them understand the purpose and long-term goals of the organisation, inspiring them to contribute actively. Strategic engagement also creates an inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions (Wooldridge & Floyd,1990). It encourages open dialogue, active listening, and respect for diverse perspectives. Everyone's input should be valued and considered. In addition, Wheelwright (1984) argues that strategic planning engagement invites employees from different departments and levels of the organisation to participate in the strategic planning process. This ensures diverse insights and avoids a top-down approach, making employees feel their voices are heard. Moreover, Thompson et al. (2007) add that the engagement of employees in the process of strategic planning helps to clearly define the objectives and outcomes of the strategic planning process. Employees understand what is expected of them and how their contributions will be evaluated. This provides focus and increases accountability. On the other hand, Randolph (2000) views the engagement of employees in strategic planning as one way of acknowledging and appreciating employees' contributions to the strategic planning process. The engagement recognises their efforts, and this reinforces the importance of their involvement. He also concluded that employee engagement in strategic planning is an ongoing process, and organisations should continuously seek opportunities to involve employees.

2.2. Strategies to Ensure Employees' Engagement in Strategic Planning

Employee engagement in strategic planning is a critical aspect of organisational success in Tanzania, as it is in any other country. Engaging employees in strategic planning ensures that their knowledge, expertise, and perspectives are considered, enhancing the likelihood of successful implementation and achieving desired outcomes. A number of strategies for proper engagement of employees in the strategic planning process have been suggested by researchers. The study by Reid (1989) indicates that communication and transparency are one of the strategies. The study insists that effective communication is essential to engage employees in strategic planning. Organisations should openly share the purpose, goals, and objectives of the strategic planning process. Employees should be informed about the progress and outcomes. Transparent communication creates a sense of trust and ownership among employees. Also, Robert (1991 had a view that Inclusive Planning Process is essential during the engagement process. It is important to Involve employees from various levels and departments of the organisation in the planning process (Robert, 1991). This inclusivity ensures a diversity of perspectives and increases the likelihood of identifying potential challenges and opportunities. Encourage employees to share their ideas, concerns, and feedback, and create a culture that values their input. Further, training and development have been suggested as another method that can ensure the effective energumen of employees in the strategic planning process (Sagwa, 2002). The provision of training and developmental opportunities to employees enhances their understanding of strategic planning concepts and methodologies (Sagwa, 2002). This empowers them to actively participate and contribute effectively during the planning process. Training programs can include topics such as strategic thinking, goal-setting, and performance measurement (Sagwa, 2002). In addition, Mankins and Steele (2005) noted that recognition and reward improve the active participation of employees in the process of developing strategic planning. Acknowledgement and appreciation of the contributions of employees who actively participate in the strategic

planning process is essential. Recognition includes verbal appreciation, rewards, or promotions (Margaret, 2005). Recognising employee efforts reinforces their engagement and motivates others to get involved (Margaret, 2005).

Moreover, implementation and the feedback loop are other strategies that increase the effective participation of employees in strategic planning. Engage employees beyond the planning stage by involving them in the implementation and monitoring phases (Sagwa, 2002). Regularly update employees on the progress of strategic initiatives and seek their feedback. This involvement enables employees to understand their role in achieving strategic objectives and fosters accountability. Adding to the strategies that ensure active participation and engagement of employees in strategic planning, Margaret (2005) suggested empowerment and autonomy to employees as a key aspect. The organisation should continue to provide employees with the autonomy to contribute their ideas and make decisions within their areas of expertise. Empowered employees feel a sense of ownership and are more likely to be engaged in the strategic planning process. In addition, Das (2000) added that strategic planning should be an iterative process, and organisations should encourage employees to contribute to continuous improvement. There should be established mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes or regular meetings, for employees to share their insights and ideas on enhancing the planning process and implementation strategies (Das, 2000). However, Arasa (2002) argued that the strategies are not specific to one context but can be applied in any context to engage employees in strategic planning. Adapt them to the unique culture, challenges, and requirements of your organisation and seek to continuously improve the engagement processes to achieve the best outcomes (Arasa, 2002).

2.3. Research Gap

Previous studies have shown the importance of involving different internal stakeholders in strategic planning (Berman et al., 1999). One part of the prior literature has been focused on various internal stakeholder groups, such as managers (e.g. Vilà and Canales 2008) and employees (Hart, 1992) involvement in the planning process and does not look inside these groups. The others are studying the participation of different managerial positions. There is more literature about the roles of managers in strategic planning. However, the involvement of specialists and blue-collar workers has been studied less. Similarly, the concurrent participation of different positions in the strategic planning process has gotten little attention in previous studies. Therefore, the current study aims to fill the gap by exploring strategies used by public organisations to engage their employees in the process of strategic planning in Tanzania.

3. Theoretical Framework

Strategic planning involves the process of defining an organisation's direction and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue that direction. Considering different theories during the strategic planning process is of paramount importance. There are several theories and approaches to strategic planning that have evolved over time. The commonly used theoretical assumptions include SWOT, Porter's Five Forces, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Blue Ocean Strategy. Others are Mintzberg's 5 Ps, Scenario Planning and Balanced Scorecard.

The current study opted to use the Balanced Scorecard and Resource-Based View (RBV) as a guide of the study. The two theories help emphasise the need and importance of engaging employees in strategic planning. Balanced Scorecard theory requires organisations to consider multiple perspectives during the process of strategic planning development. Among the important factors listed in the theory that should be considered are internal processes. In this case, the theory addresses the need of an organisation to formulate a procedure that will allow its internal stakeholders (employees included) to have active participation in the organisation's strategic planning. Therefore, the theory has guided this particular study on different mechanisms being employed by organisation management to have active engagement of employees in the process of strategic planning (Boyd & Elliot,1998).

Resource-based view (RBV) theory was also found important to guide this study in that the theory suggests that the organisation should consider its uniqueness in terms of resources and capabilities. The theories will help the current study to establish different resources (human resources) within the organisation, which, if well-utilised, bring a positive impact to the process of developing institution strategic planning. The theory will further guide the study on how the available human resources, that is, employees in the organisation, can contribute positively to the growth of the organisation when they are engaged in the strategic planning of the organisation. The theory will help identify and leverage internal resources and capabilities that can create a sustainable competitive advantage for the organisation (David,1997).

4. Methodology

The current study employs a qualitative research method. Qualitative methodology is designated for its ability to probe into personal interactions and insights, permitting a thorough examination of the factors influencing this behavior. To facilitate data collection, a phenomenological approach was adopted by conducting interviews with individuals experienced in the phenomenon. Unstructured interviews aid primary data collection, allowing for a detailed exploration of participants' experiences, opinions, and expectations regarding disclosures in public sector accounting practices in Tanzania (Ary et al., 2010). The use of unstructured interviews fosters collaborative discussions between interviewers and informants, resulting in the collection of high-quality data (Patton, 2002). A purposive and convenient sampling technique was employed to select 20 participants from different government agencies and public parastatals. The participants were samples from different government sectors, including energy, higher education, transport, agriculture, tourism, banks and politics.

The data analysis follows a systematic and transparent approach, as advocated by Punch (2000). It encompasses data reduction, organisation, identification of significant trends, and interpretation. Thematic analysis, utilising Miles and

Huberman's (1994) stage analysis, is employed, involving data reduction, display, and drawing and checking of conclusions. Initial conclusions are drawn during data collection and documented in field notes. The coding process allows for reflection on field research activities and participant interactions, with related voices and quotations grouped into themes and sub-themes. To ensure data rigor, a systematic approach comprising design, data collection, review, interpretation, and reporting of findings is crucial. Guba (1981) proposed four elements — credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability — for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Member-checking and peer debriefing are employed to enhance credibility and accuracy, while methodological triangulation and participant checks are utilised to strengthen validity and transferability (Yin, 2017; Burau & Anderson, 2014). Full transparency regarding the study's purpose and data use is provided to participants, with their privacy safeguarded through coding their identities and locations. The study adheres to strict ethical guidelines, obtaining consent from each participant and ensuring that research findings will be used solely for academic purposes. The study is conducted with integrity and trust throughout the process (Britten, 1995).

5. Limitation of the Study

The study's limitations include a small sample size, which may hinder the generalizability of findings on Tanzania's public sector employees' involvement in strategic planning. Additionally, relying on self-reported data introduces the risk of bias or inaccuracies. The absence of statistical methods in data analysis could compromise the accuracy and reliability of findings. Furthermore, biases from researchers and participants may influence data interpretation, potentially affecting the study's validity.

6. Results and Discussion

The current aim is to examine strategies used by public organisations to engage their employees in the process of strategic planning in Tanzania. The data were collected using interviews and analysed thematically. All emergencies (themes) from the analysis were recorded and presented here. Generally, the findings indicated that involving employees in the strategic planning process is essential for the successful implementation of strategic initiatives in the Tanzania public sector. Among the emerging themes from the findings on the strategies used to engage employees in strategic planning in the public sector include Participatory workshops, task forces and committees, surveys and feedback mechanisms, as well as training and development programs. Other identified strategies from the findings are communication channels, performance management alignment, employee empowerment, recognition and incentives and continuous improvement.

6.1. Participatory Workshops

The study findings showed that participatory workshops are one of the strategies used by public organisations in Tanzania to engage employees in the process of strategic planning. The study findings indicate that public organisations involved in this study organise workshops where employees from various levels of the organisation come together to brainstorm, discuss, and provide input on the strategic planning process. The findings from this study reveal that this collaborative approach allows for diverse perspectives to be considered in the process of developing strategic planning. From the interviews with heads of public institutions, one of them commented as follows:

We use different methods to make sure our employees are engaged actively in the process of developing strategic planning for our institution. The methods are not always the same, but we mostly organise workshops where all employees are invited to contribute their thoughts on how we can have a better strategic plan for the institution. I am happy to tell you that this approach has been very fruitful for us as every employee is happy to participate and be part of those who plan for this institution.

To add on how the participatory workshops have been the best strategies to engage employees in the strategic planning process, one of the employees commented as follows during interviews:

Our institution has different ways of engaging us in the process of strategic planning. The commonly used and which we employees are happy with is participatory workshops. This process provides opportunities for employees to actively participate in decision-making processes related to strategic choices and priorities.

The current findings are in line with that of Aosa (1992), who observed that engaging employees in the strategic planning process of their institutions is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership, commitment, and alignment with the organisation's goals and objectives. In the same study, Aosa (1992) stated that one of the strategies to make employees actively involved in the strategic planning process is to encourage participation. Also, Abdullah (2000) had the same views as the current study findings, which are that participatory workshops add the involvement of employees in the strategic planning process. Abdullah (2000) suggests that institutions should encourage employees to offer feedback, share ideas, and ask questions throughout the strategic planning process. The author adds that this creates formal and informal avenues for input gathering, such as surveys, focus groups, suggestion boxes, or town hall meetings.

6.2. Task Forces and Committees

The study showed that task forces and committees are another strategy employed by different public organisations to ensure that employees are involved in the strategic planning process. The study findings informed that in this strategy, organisations establish task forces or committees comprising employees from different departments or levels to work alongside leadership in the strategic planning process. The findings reveal that this strategy allows for cross-functional collaboration and a sense of ownership among participants. In an interview with public institution managers, one of them commented on the following:

Engagement of employees in the strategic planning process is a priority in our institution. To ensure every employee participates in the process, we always form task forces or committees with representation from all departments and sections. The team and management work together to ensure that the strategy plan developed meets the employees' desires and that they own it.

To add on the same, another manager from one of the public organisations insisted on how the organisation uses committees as one of the strategies to engage employees in the process of strategic planning development. From the interviews, the following comments were made:

We usually hold meetings with the committees established under a representation principle, and senior leaders communicate the strategic goals and invite feedback from employees. This open forum encourages dialogue and helps foster a culture of transparency and engagement.

The current findings are also supported by Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), who, in their studies, found that the formulation of representative committees is one of the best strategies for engaging employees in the strategic planning process. The author put forward that for the task force and committees to be effective, there should be freedom and non-interference from the top management, and instead, there should be sharing of information between the two parts. Mankins and Steele (2005) further suggest that employees can be involved in forming cross-functional teams or task forces to work on specific aspects of the strategic plan.

6.3. Training and Development Programs

The study findings revealed that training and development programmes are another strategy used by public organisations to ensure the active engagement of employees in the strategic planning process. The study findings show that public organisations provide training sessions to employees on strategic planning concepts and processes. The study found that providing training on strategic planning to employees helps employees understand the significance of the strategic plan and their role in its successful implementation. In an interview with heads of public institutions, one had this comment on the role of training in strategic planning for employees:

We take the exercise of the strategic planning process very seriously. We want every member of our institution to participate and give his/her contribution. To make sure the engagement of employees is fruitful in the process, training is given to all employees on how to develop effective strategic planning for the institution. By doing so, during the strategic plan development, our engagements with employees meet with the right people who know what is supposed to be included in the strategic planning.

Further, the study found that the training offered by public institutions to their employees helps them understand the organisation's strategic plan and empowers them. The findings show that training empowers employees by giving them decision-making authority and autonomy within their areas of expertise. This sense of ownership can lead to increased commitment to the organisation's strategic goals.

In an interview with employees of one of the public institutions, one of them commented as follows:

Training is offered to empower employees to take ownership of the strategic planning process by delegating responsibilities and tasks related to implementing the strategic plan. We, employees, have come to realise that we are part of the institution, and we are obliged to make sure the institution's strategic plan is achieved.

There are several researchers who agree with current findings that training employees on strategic planning adds to involvement and engagement. Randolph (2000) argued that for institutions to provide training and resources to help employees develop the skills and capabilities needed to contribute effectively to the strategic planning process. Also, Sagwa (2002) suggests that employers should provide opportunities for employees to understand the strategic planning process, its importance, and how their roles contribute to the organisation's overall strategy.

6.4. Feedback Mechanisms and Communication Channels

Feedback Mechanisms and Communication Channels are another theme that emerged out of the findings as another strategy that is used by public organisations to engage employees in the strategic planning process. The findings showed that the use of surveys, suggestion boxes, and other feedback mechanisms to gather insights and suggestions from employees on the strategic planning process helps in generating views on their involvement. The study noted that this method ensures that a wide range of opinions and ideas are considered. In addressing this theme, one of the public organisation managers involved in the study commented the following during interviews:

As a way of making sure we engage every employee in the strategic planning process, we have established a special zone for employees to give their opinions on the strategic plan, particularly for those who cannot be reached physically. This helps us have as many opinions from the employees as possible and helps shape and reshape the institution's strategic plan.

Further, the study findings show that to enable feedback processes, public organisations have established clear communication channels to keep employees informed about the progress of the strategic planning process. The study findings revealed that having regular updates and feedback loops helps maintain employees' engagement. From the interviews, one of the heads of public organisations as follows on how his organisation has established channels of communication as a means of ensuring active engagement of employees in the strategic planning process:

To ensure our employees are actively involved in the strategic planning process, we have established a clear channel of communication for them to give their opinions and receive feedback from us. The communication channels provide up-to-date information to both the institutions and the employees.

The current findings are supported by Thompson et al. (2007), who advise the management to make sure there are open communication channels to keep employees informed about the strategic planning process, the purpose behind it, and how it aligns with the organisation's mission and vision. Further, Steiner (1979) supports the current findings as he observes that keeping employees informed about the progress of the strategic planning process and how their contributions have influenced the direction of the organisation is one of the best mechanisms for engaging the employees. Moreover, Greenley (1986) states that it is important for organisations to establish a feedback loop to gather input on the effectiveness of the strategic plan implementation and seek suggestions for employee improvements.

6.5. Performance Management Alignment and Incentives

The study findings also showed that linking individual and team goals to the strategic objectives of the organisation is another strategy used by public organisations to engage employees in the strategic planning process. The findings indicate that by aligning performance management systems with the strategic plan, employees are more likely to be invested in achieving the organisation's goals. To substantiate this argument, one of the managers of the public institutions involved in this study commented on the following:

> The best way to make sure employees are engaged and involved in the institution's strategic planning is by linking their roles and duties to the institution's strategic objectives. This helps to engage employees directly with the strategic plan. It is very easy to have opinions in the due course of implementing the strategy objectives in their duties, and these opinions may be included during the strategy plan reviews. We have been doing so here, and it has been very effective as many employees give their opinions, which we take very seriously during strategy plan reviews.

In addition, the findings also revealed that rewarding employees who aligned their role with the institution's strategic plan helps motivate employees to engage more with the institution's strategic plan. The findings informed that recognising and rewarding employees who actively contribute to the strategic planning process is essential for active participation. The findings revealed that incentivising participation can motivate employees to take an active interest and engage more effectively.

The present study findings agree with that of Aosa (1992), who suggests that the institution should connect individual and team goals with the organisation's strategic objectives to ensure alignment at all levels of the organisation. Also, Bett (2003) agreed with the study findings that recognising and rewarding employees who actively contribute ideas, feedback, and efforts towards the strategic planning process to reinforce a culture of engagement and involvement is the best mechanism of ensuring the active participation of employees in the strategic planning process.

6.6. Continuous Improvement

The study identified continuous improvement as another strategy used by public organisations to ensure the active participation of employees in the strategic planning process. The study findings reveal that public organisations encourage a culture of continuous improvement by seeking regular feedback from employees on the strategic planning process. The findings noted that this feedback loop ensures the strategy remains relevant and adaptable to changing circumstances. In one of the interviews with heads of public organisations, one of them commented as follows:

> We usually carry out evaluation exercises on our strategic objectives. In this process, all employees are involved in providing views on how the strategic objectives have been implemented in their respective departments/sections by listing their strengths and weaknesses. Their views are taken seriously in the review process, and we have evidence that, from the opinions of employees, our institution has managed to add to or reduce a number of strategic objectives. Our employees have made a remarkable contribution due to their engagement in the institution's strategic planning process.

The current study agrees with Boyd and Elliot (1998), who found that institutions should carry out an evaluation of the strategic objective in which employees should be given a chance to provide opinions as a means of engaging and improving the strategic planning process. In addition, Bryson (1989) insisted that institutions' evaluations of the strategic objectives should aim to celebrate milestones and successes achieved as a result of the strategic plan, acknowledging the contributions of employees towards these achievements.

7. Conclusion

Engaging employees in the strategic planning process is essential as they bring a variety of perspectives and experiences to the table. By involving them in the strategic planning process, organisations can benefit from a broader range of viewpoints, leading to more comprehensive and innovative strategies. Also, employees who are actively engaged in strategic planning are more likely to contribute new ideas and innovative solutions. Involving them in the process can help organisations tap into the creativity of their workforce and identify opportunities for growth and improvement. Furthermore, involving employees in the strategic planning process leads to better decision-making. Employees who are closer to the day-to-day operations of the business often have valuable insights that inform strategic decisions and help identify potential risks and challenges.

Generally, the study has identified the need and strategies employed by public organisations to ensure that employees are engaged actively in the strategic planning process. By implementing these strategies, public sector organisations create a more inclusive and participatory strategic planning process, leading to better alignment, engagement, and successful implementation of strategic initiatives. Further, implementing these strategies in organisations has created a culture of collaboration, engagement, and alignment that empowers employees to actively contribute to the strategic planning process and drive the organisation towards its goals.

The study concluded that engaging employees in the strategic planning process is not only beneficial but also essential for organisations looking to thrive in today's dynamic business landscape. By involving employees in the process, both the institutions and the employees are benefited.

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