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***Factors Affecting Strategic Planning in
Universities***

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Abstract

University management processes have evolved in the past 50 years in line with various changes that are sweeping the public sector organisations. Strategic planning was previously thought to be a concept of the private sector organisations. While adopting strategic planning, universities face unique problems due to their nature and environment in which they operate. A large number of stakeholders must be considered. This situation complicates the strategic planning process. Communication is a major tenet of ensuring that all stakeholders participate towards the success of the strategic planning process. However, as discussed in this paper, without communication, the chances of success can easily become an illusion.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Introduction

The role that universities play is of great importance in any society. Over the last years, universities have evolved more and more to take over corporate management practices in the quest of providing the highest quality of education to their student populations. As the world changes, the engine to this change can be attributed to universities that continue to evolve to produce skilled labour ready to continue the changes in the world. Like any other organisations, universities face a myriad of problems that if not well addressed can affect their capacity to offer good services and eventually lead to the paralysis or collapsing of the institution. How does a university identify present and future opportunities and trends that they can undertake to remain relevant in the fast changing world? Strategic planning is a major tenet of any university that is keen on addressing its present and future challenges, while at the same time ensuring innovativeness and continuity of its essential services and roles to the society.

A good strategic planning process allows a university to organise its leadership to be proactive in affirming the organisation's mission and values while continuously redefining its role. The present-day universities must realise that the old days of university management are gone and will never come back. In addition to having different challenges, the present

environment exposes universities to different requirements. Looking at the current trends in the world, university education has exploded and that governments are increasingly unable to take the huge funding bills of higher education. Goodall (2009) asserts that university education has become so expensive that it seems unrealistic to expect governments to take up these huge financial resources. Further, students are the main beneficiaries of higher education. Hence, they must cover at least some of the costs. As such, in addition to being unable to cover all the costs, governments are unwilling to pay up since university products carry considerable benefits to those who have acquired them. In the light of these changes, the university institutions have been forced to become “hybrid institutions”, that is, semi-public and semi-private organisations. The university environment has become a market economy environment where there is cutthroat competition for students and consequently for financial resources to cover budgetary requirements that are not covered through public funding. The emergence of new “accredited” corporate universities, virtual open universities, and for-profit educational institutions is a clear indication of the drastic changes in the environment that universities operate in.

Another major driver for change in the high education environment is the explosion of knowledge. With new fields of knowledge emerging in all quarters, the current state of knowledge is too fast for one institution to master. In order to emerge successfully in these muddy waters, institutions have to choose wisely the skills and knowledge that they can offer or extend their limitations through mergers, collaborations, and networks. In addition, since knowledge has become very important in the current world, universities are under scrutiny by society, governments, individuals, and all stakeholders concerning what they do and/or how they do it. The issue of accountability has therefore become very significant and hence the importance of the projects and strategies that universities adopt to meet these increasing demands and challenges.

Understanding Strategic Planning

In its broadest definition, strategic planning in universities involves deciding in advance what the institution intends to do and how to do it. As higher education becomes more and more of semi-public and semi-private, strategic planning has become more central to universities' planning of various programmes that they undertake in the process of remaining competitive and relevant in their fields of operation. Atkinson (2006) defines strategic planning as the process through, which organisations develop and maintain consistency between their objectives, resources, and their changing opportunities. Balogun (2006) goes on to define strategic management as the total concentration of organisation's resources on specific and predetermined measurable outcomes.

Strategic planning is one of the many organisational management tools that have emerged in various changes that are going on in the management of corporate organisations. Like other management tools, strategic planning is a tool that is meant for only one purpose: to help the organisation to do a better job in its areas of responsibility. Strategic planning allows human resource agenda and efforts to be aligned with the overall company's objectives. Further, it allows the organisation to respond effectively to changes in its environment. Concisely, strategic planning is a strict and planned exertion for organisations to settle on choices for managing their activities while upholding why they execute such activities to influence future outcomes.

Another important aspect to look at in understanding the concept of strategic planning is in its wording. The dissection of its words, namely strategic and planning, offers important tips of the key elements of the concept. The term "strategic" indicates a push for the best and well thought out decisions that respond to the organisation's environmental circumstances. Since organisations must respond to both known and unknown circumstances, the 'strategic' decisions must therefore focus on the achievement of organisation's objectives with the available

resources while remaining responsive to the often hostile and dynamic environments of operation. On the other hand, 'planning' shows the part of deliberately establishing objectives and creating methodologies to accomplish the expected outcomes.

The process of strategic planning calls for high discipline. According to Goodall (2009), the course requires strategic conspirators to collect, integrate up-to-date data, and/or try hypotheses before they are incorporated into the organisation. In the end, strategic planning is majorly about decisions and actions. Therefore, it addresses the choices that the organisation decides to do or not to do. This observation indicates that since an organisation is required to do many actions yet they cannot be achieved at the same time, it must therefore prioritise. While prioritising, the organisation must ensure that its planning gives a strategy for achieving the most important goals that will give it success in its activities. Indeed, much of the organisation's strategy is focused on making touching decisions in choosing priority areas to focus on.

Strategic planning can be an organisation-wide activity. It can even be focused on just one department or programme. Regardless of the focus, strategic planning is complex, challenging, and sometimes messy. However, it qualifies as an important aspect of any organisation in creating a clear map of where it is and where it desires to be in the future. In both public and private organisations, strategic planning gives specific directions on financial strategies, marketing strategies, human resources, organisational develop strategies, and information technology deployments.

Concisely, a good strategic planning must have various key characteristics. Although some of these characteristics are evident from the above discussion, it is important to identify them for the interest of applying the concept in a university environment. The characteristics of a good strategic planning are as follows:

Strategic: The term shows the conscious, informed and responsive nature of the decisions to the environment of the organisation.

Planning: This element shows that the process is a deliberate establishment the organisational agenda.

Fundamental: Strategic planning is elemental since it requires prioritising on decisions and objectives that are more critical than others. Consequently, it is all about doing what is fundamental for the organisation, as not all actions can be done at a go.

Disciplined: Discipline is a mix of close adhering to the requirements of a successful strategic planning. An organisation reviews the powers, flaws, chances, and intimidation concerning its actions before choosing the most appropriate course. In a strategic planning process, it is important to have discipline since a sequence of questions are raised to test any assumptions and to examine evidence and/or use of present-day information to anticipate the future of the organisation.

Decision-making: In strategic planning, decisions must be made to answer important questions that are raised in the planning process. In its entirety, strategic planning is all about decisions for choices of action.

Long-Range Plan: Long-range plan refers to the duration of actualising the strategic plans. Some organisation put in place strategic plans running for six months or less while others can go up to five or more years. It is upon the organisation to decide the long-range plan for its strategic planning.

Operating Plan: This process refers to the detailed action plans that guide the process of accomplishing the goals laid out in the strategic plan. The operating plans for each organisation must translate into the achievement of its vision.

Strategy Hierarchy-In large corporations such as universities, different levels of strategy are evident. According to Balogun (2006), three levels can be represented as follows:

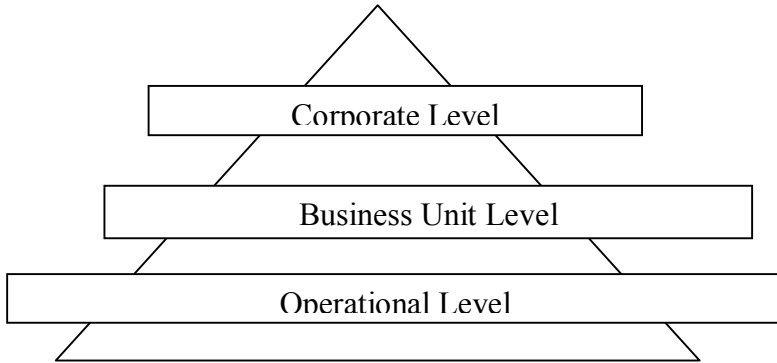


Figure 1: Levels of Strategy in an Organisation

Corporate strategy is the highest level of strategic planning. It is very important in giving the organisation a direction towards its corporate values, corporate culture, corporate goals, and corporate missions. Corporate strategy is the broadest level of strategic planning. It implies the organisation-wide actions and decisions.

Strategic business unit strategy level of strategic planning refers to the planning at the departmental or other semi-autonomous units within an organisation. For instance, at the university level, the overall corporate level strategic planning may not cover all areas of the university. It is important to restructure the plan according to processes or strategic business units. The strategic business units (SBU) are the various departments or sub-autonomous units that have their operations such as hiring, budgeting, purchasing of products, and price setting among others elements that are separated from the main university management. The modern university has so many operations that cannot be run without strategic business units. Consequently, in such a case, the business units play a very important role. They are responsible for creating the university's business strategies, which are in tune with the overall corporate strategy (Smith, 2013). However, in the recent past, strategic business units have been seen as great hindrances to the achievement of the organisational goals. As such, many organisations have adopted the functional

strategies. The functional strategies include human resource strategies, marketing strategies, human resource strategies, information technology management tactics, new product development schemes, legal approaches, and financial strategies. Each functional department must ensure that its respective strategy is in tune with the overall organisation's strategic planning tenets. This goal is achieved by ensuring the goals of the functional department are derived from the broader organisational strategy. The operational level is the lowest level of organisational strategic planning. According to Balogun (2006), it has a narrow focus on an organisation's strategic planning since it deals with the day-to-day operational activities that go towards the actual doing of the strategy. The operational segments must work within the set budget. They are not allowed to adjust or make their budgets. These operational activities are informed business unit or functional strategies, which in extension depend on the corporate strategy.

Purpose of the Study

As a requirement, university institutions are expected to develop strategic plans to enhance a result-based management as well as efficiency in their operations. These plans are important in providing a direction on resource targeting and management, as well as in programme implementation. However, in the last decade, concerns have been raised regarding what is perceived as improper strategic planning or inadequate strategic planning practices in institutions of higher education. One of the main factors that determine the success of strategic planning is the human resource in the organisation.

According to Balogun (2006), it is important to have a clear management practice that has the ability of bringing all people, especially the institution's employees and top management, together to ensure collaborative efforts towards the actualisation of the strategic plans. The size of the modern-day university requires total collaboration between individuals, departments, and other stakeholders of the organisation to ensure that all activities are streamlined and in tune with the

overall aspirations of the organisation. However, with the increasing concerns about the deteriorating quality of education that is offered in higher institutions, fingers are being pointed on the institutions' lack of management of human resources to ensure the success of strategic plans that are usually very good on paper. If implemented well, they can transform higher education forever. Many organisations do not understand that the key to successful strategic plan lies within their human resource department, which is held together good communication processes. Communication plays an important role in putting across the expectations of the organisations, decisions on various actions, decisions on resource allocation, and progresses in each segment of the implementation of the strategic plans. Consequently, communication is one of the key determinants of the success of strategic planning in universities. The issues identified above are major reasons why the strategic planning process breaks or thrives depending on how they are handled. The purpose of this study is to discuss the relevance of communication in the success strategic planning. It shows how lack of communication can easily jeopardise any chances of a successful strategic planning.

The Significance of the Study

This study on communication as a major factor that affects strategic planning will play an important role in shedding more light on a topic that has been around for some time. Many existing studies have focused on the importance and relevance of strategic planning in universities. However, they have not adequately covered the various issues that hinder successful execution of the same. This study will be therefore very significant for various reasons.

The study will reveal important findings that will greatly help university institutions to implement their strategic plans successfully. It will also be important in contributing to the existing literature on strategic planning. Very few studies have focused on the key factors that affect strategic planning. The results in this paper will be very important for people who are

interested in the related studies. Another significance of the study is that it will also shed more light on the researcher regarding areas of the study relating to strategic management. Consequently, this study comes at an ideal time when universities are under pressure to transform their strategic plans from paper into action as a way of ensuring quality education and hence the rightful and relevant contribution to knowledge development in their societies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section discusses what other scholars and researchers have written and discussed regarding the role of communication in strategic planning. Literature is very important since it helps one to understand how far other researchers have gone in terms of explaining the topic under study and consequently helping to identify knowledge gaps that the researcher can fill. The section will most importantly tackle the theoretical foundation of communication in strategic planning and consequently help the researcher to extend the knowledge beyond what is available in literature. The section will also track the part that dialogue played during the early days of strategic planning. The section will also show how communication use in universities has changed over the years up to the present duration.

Theoretical Communication Frameworks for Strategic Planning

From the existing literature, strategic planning theories can be classified into normative and descriptive theories (Cutright, 2001). Normative theory is a derivative of the principles-and-processes school of thought and communication management science. Theories in this category are highly dependent on strategic fit where organisations must adopt intern and external communication policies based on their potential of offering growth benefits (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). On the other hand, the descriptive theory is derived from a more data-oriented communication approach, which has evolved from the existing

larger body of empirical work that is related to decision-making and human problem-solving behaviour. The theories employ deductive and empirical methods to produce and use information in their application.

In the 1970s, major developments in the field of management theory later resulted in the establishment of strategic planning as a distinctive body (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). Such developments came at a time when other disciplines such as management science, systems approach, and behavioural were gaining prominence. Communication greatly affected the definition and conception of strategic planning during this time. Since its establishment, there have been various concerns and questions regarding the theoretical foundations of strategic planning as a discipline in the wide organisational management and development field (Elbanna, 2008). The first concern relates to the evident lack of well and formally established descriptive communication theory of strategic planning that is based on empirical data and evidence. Secondly, concerns have been raised concerning the general lack of empirical studies relating to strategic planning in organisations. Thirdly, there are concerns that strategic planning is not a perfect approach to organisational development. In fact, no adequate information has been published on the difference between organisations that use formalised and non-formalised strategic plans (Lynch, 2000). Lastly, questions have been raised concerning the low level of integration of strategic planning with other various communication approaches of organisational development.

History of Strategic Planning: How Communication was Applied in the Early Days

Strategic planning is deeply rooted in military history. It is conceptualised from the military's approach to planning the destruction of enemy forces through effective use and deployment of military resources. Early writers on military affairs have acknowledged the importance of communication in planning. For instance, in *The Art of War*, Sun Tuz wrote, "The

general who wins a battle makes many calculations than the general who loses the battle and its by attention to this I can suggest who is likely to lose or win a battle” (Cutright, 2001, p. 24). Such calculations are synonymous with communication tactics that one can deploy in a given time and scenario to connect all involved parties. However, the discipline of strategic planning gained prominence in the 20th century as the business environment became highly dynamic and very competitive. It also within this time since 1950s that more and more research has focused on the role of communication in strategic planning and strategic management.

Strategic Planning in Universities: Does Communication Play any Role?

It is not easy to discuss the concept of strategic planning without a mention of the two concepts as they are closely related. Both strategic planning and strategic management involve the organisation’s wish for understanding and communicating its current state and put in place decisions to take it successfully into the future. Just like strategic planning, strategic management and communication gained dominance in the 1950s and 1960s where Igor Ansoff, Alfred Chandler, and Peter Drucker were the most influential pioneers of the field (Balogun, 2006).

According to Davoudi and Strange (2008), Peter Drucker was one of the ardent theorists in strategic management and communication. He has dozens of communication management books under his belt. With a career spanning over 50 years, his contribution to strategic management and communication is profound. One of the most significant assertions developed by Drucker revolved around the importance of communication objectives in an organisational setting (Elbanna, 2008). He claimed that an organisation without clear communication objectives would easily lose its mandate and drive itself into irrelevance. Consequently, any organisation that is worth its name should have communication agendas to guide its activities at all times. His focus on these objectives led to the

emergence of his theory titled, “management by objectives” (Balogun, 2006). The management by objective theory called for the process of setting communication indicators and tools for monitoring progress from the lowest to the highest levels of an organisation (Atkinson, 2006). He is also credited for correctly predicting the importance of intellectual capital as it is known today. Further, he predicted the emergence of “knowledge worker” and the role that such a worker can play in enhancing communication and interaction in organisations. He claimed that with excellent communication knowledge, tasks would be carried out easily under the dictatorship of who has the highest knowledge, irrespective of his or her positions in the organisation. Overall, his contribution is very important to the concept of communication in strategic planning since it advocated the centrality of communication objectives in ensuring that organisations remain focused on their journey towards success and better efficiency in their services.

Igor Ansoff built his approach to strategic management from the work of Chandlers by adding a variety of communication concepts, which had a very big impact on strategic management. He established the Ansoff Matrix, which is represented as a network that focuses on bazaar expansion, horizontal and vertical incorporation, bazaar infiltration, commodity improvement, and extension tactics. He presented communication as the only tool through which these strategies could be of help since they (strategies) were meant to connect various business stakeholders. While developing these strategies, Ansoff was convinced that organisations that deployed excellent communication plans would be better prepared for the future opportunities and challenges. His corporate strategy, which he called the gap analysis, was a very important addition to the strategic management and planning since it indicated the push for understanding and communicating where an organisation is and where it wants to be and what it needs to do (gap) to be where it wants to be. The action points for propelling an organisation to where it needs to be were referred to as the “gap reducing actions”.

In the 1980s, public sector organisations, including universities began to adopt corporate style strategic planning approaches in the process of ensuring better delivery of services. Initially, bureaucracy, politics, and other interferences made universities' management very wanting. Their services were in dire need of review. In addition, there was little accountability, a situation that greatly affected the organisations' capacity to plan and deliver services. Cutright (2001) confirms that these approaches to strategic planning were based on the previously existing corporate strategic planning models. They had adopted few variations, which did not give weight to communication, to reflect the unique needs of the public sector organisations. According to Lynch (2000), for successful planning and implementations process, it is paramount for organisations to adopt strategic communication planning and implementation processes that reflect the unique aspects of public organisations such as universities (Howell et al., 2003). Such communication approaches can provide better outcomes in strategic planning as compared to the long-range planning process that was previously common in the public sector organisations (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). The fact that many universities are in the public sector means that it is important to have strategic planning approaches that allow for opportunism, bargaining, and response to the dynamic forces and influences that characterise the political environment. Communication is the only means of realising this goal. The lag in the adoption of strategic communication in universities was mainly due to the perception that strategic planning was more suited for business (Cummings & Worley, 2001). For instance, it was claimed that since strategic planning followed near yearly appropriation cycles, it could be difficult to adapt it in public organisations. In addition, it was claimed that the less control over administrative systems due to bureaucracies as compared to business would be a great hindrance (Cummings & Worley, 2001). Another major argument that acted to reduce the momentum towards the adoption of proper communication strategies in universities was that they lacked a "bottom-line".

The laws and policies that guide what public organisations do are mainly made by political authorities, which greatly hinder the process of independent decision-making processes in universities.

The introduction of Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) by the Department of Defence (DoD) in the 1960s marked the entry of strategic planning federal agencies. Up to date, the DoD has continued to improve its strategic planning by acknowledging the central role that communication plays in terms of bringing stakeholders together. It is a key tenet of its management. The PPBS systems have been very important in guiding the DoD in its labour and materials, as well as strategies for the acquisition of the materials and lifecycle support. In this case, the DoD can determine its present and future requirements, which are then aligned with its budget to ensure continuity of relevance of its activities (Elbanna, 2008). PPBS was put in place for the need to ensure effective and efficient use of financial resources based on priorities, needs, and projected available resources. The appropriate and working communication tools had to be established. Indeed, this need marked the earliest application of communication during strategic planning in the public sector organisation (Cutright, 2001).

Universities, just like other public organisations, operate in a more complex environment as compared to the private sector organisations. This situation was recognised in the early 1960s. For instance, they must ensure that they answer questions of value as well as democratic principles that must always underlie the communication process. Such principles often complicate the process of strategic planning in terms of determining the most applicable communication mode, its content, and process. It is important for the strategic planning process to be open, while at the same time ensuring that all university's stakeholders are put into consideration when developing communication tools (Balogun, 2006). In addition, the goals and objectives that are defined in the formulation of the plans must

conform to the legal policy requirements that are based on values of fairness and equity. Another important factor that affects the process and feasibility of achieving specific communication objectives is political influences. While these factors represent major hindrances to planning in universities, various authors have advanced models and techniques to address these challenges. For instance, in 1988, Bryson proposed a model that centred on the issue communication management (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). While issues are generated from different factors, of great was the attention that this model gave towards political influence as a major driver of strategy in public sector organisations. Another author, namely Koteen, also supported Bryson's approach and model in 1991. He advocated a focus on management of strategic issues as the main areas of concern for public and non-for-profit organisations (Elbanna, 2008).

While strategic planning is mainly focused on private sector organisations, importing its tenets into the public sector organisations requires stakeholders to have a clear understanding of the context within which strategic planning happens in the two sides of organisations (Cutright, 2001). The difference between private sector and public sector's strategic planning greatly affects the design and completion the actual planning process as well as the implementation and success of the whole strategy. Hence, stakeholder communication design must be tailored in a way that does not bar the contribution and interaction of the two sectors. While many other differences should be put into consideration, two main factors stand out (Lynch, 2000). Firstly, in private businesses, strategic plans are more precise, clearly defined, and always related to products, competition, and return on investment, market share, and profitability. On the other hand, policies and strategies in the public sector organisations are difficult to measure. They are ambiguous and often address broad social issues (Cummings & Worley, 2001). Such a situation implies poor communication plans in the public sector. Secondly, strategy development and implementation in private organisations is confined to

participants within the specific organisation and the strategies in place for internal use. However, in the municipal sector organisations, considerable external input is witnessed. Consequently, successful implementation is dependent on cooperation with the administrative and political oversight bodies (Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). To many people, the pluralist nature of democratic governance in the public sector organisations casts major doubts on the prospects of successful undertaking of communication planning. Balogun (2006) captures well this issue of pluralism in public sector organisations. He points out that pluralism has negative consequences on the success of communication planning since it pushes public organisations to forfeit their ability to have rational and comprehensive strategic planning. It is aggravated by the fact that various interest groups must be heard and represented. This situation seriously affects the organisations' ability towards adequate planning, efficiency, and cooperation.

Goodall (2009) examines the main factors that underlie success during strategic management in the public sector organisations. He claims that cultural distinctions are responsible for the differences between strategic planning in the private and public sector organisations. Further, these differences dictate diverse expectations for successful implementation of strategic plans. The first reason behind the differences between private and public sector organisations strategic planning can be attributed to competition and communication. Unlike private organisations, public institutions have less competition. Rivalry in public sector businesses is mainly for scarce capital to run their activities. They also compete with universities within the private sector, especially in the current state where the push towards privatisation of studies is common (Balogun, 2006). As universities adopt more and more corporate approaches to organisation management, competition will be felt, although the motivation will take a longer time before it reaches the levels of competition in the private-sector organisations. The second reason that Goodall (2009) puts across is that in the public sector organisations, the influence of the customer is weaker and hence does not greatly

influence communication or decision-making. This claim can be explained using the fact that these institutions are not entirely dependent on customers for resources. For example, universities receive funding from the government and other areas. Although some of them require students to pay a considerable share of the expenses, this amount is a smaller share of what the universities receive. There is little motivation to adjust to reflect the needs of the customers (students) who in many cases do not have a lot of say on the affairs of the institution because communication networks within the institutions do not give them a clear path to follow. Since strategic planning is primarily dependent on a determination of future market requirements, it makes it difficult to have the same motivation to undertake strategic planning in public organisations as it is witnessed in private organisations (Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). The third reason why strategic planning is a challenge in universities and the public sector is the issue of performance management. In public organisations, it is difficult to breakdown performance indicators as well as a clear understanding of the rewards and punishment. This situation depicts a gap in communication. Further, there is a lot of influence from changes in leadership unlike in private organisations where financial measures are used to communicate performance. In public institutions, data for determining the performance is difficult to find from the unclear parameters that are used to gauge performance (Cummings & Worley, 2001). However, in private organisations, information on finances and other performance indicators is readily available. Universities perform many social service-related roles. It is difficult to have a yardstick for communicating performance. Since performance measurement is a fundamental tool for strategic control, without it in the public sector, there is no means for feedback and evaluations. This case easily leads to strategic plan stagnation and ultimately, its failure.

Another major problem that is common in the public sector organisations relates to the political connotations in policies, especially those that relate to leadership. A rapid politically motivated turnover of leadership in universities has been

witnessed. These rapid changes can be a great hindrance to the sustenance of long-term strategic direction for the organisation (Balogun, 2006). As political forces play a key part in the determination of leadership in universities, demands legislative oversight bodies and other stakeholders can easily overwhelm the organisation's attempts to set goals using the private sector's strategic planning processes. According to Balogun (2006), in business, strategic planning is highly influenced and guided by a high degree of rationality where plans are guided by analytical communication models and techniques. However, this situation is not the case in the public sector organisations where political forces are concerned with questions of resource allocation and decisions based on non-rational logic. Lynch (2000) confirms that the distinction between private and public organisations is evident in the scope of their roles. Public institutions have a wider scope of programmes, which are not easy to reduce or realign as they have societal purposes. While managers in private and for-profit organisations easily adjust to market dynamics, this situation is not possible in public organisations. Lastly, in public institutions leaders are likely to refer themselves as specialists rather than managers. While managers are concerned with the direction of the organisation towards profits, specialists are loyal to their occupational disciplines, which create a major difficulty in steering the organisation towards a given strategic goal (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). For instance, in universities, there is enhanced protection of workers. Hence, feelings of entitlement, stability, and risk aversion are a great hindrance to the innovative spirit of communication as an aspect of strategic planning.

The Key Steps to Communication during the Strategic Planning Process

For successful strategic planning, several major factors have to be in play for effective and efficient communication among the various university stakeholders. In this process, five steps have been advanced to guide the process systematically. The steps begin with the identification of vision and mission of the

organisation, then analysis of external, internal, gap, and benchmarking to build the organisation's strategic issues (Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). The other step is the premeditated encoding, where the company establishes and communicates its well-calculated ambitions, action plans, and campaign procedures. In the process of impanation, emergent issues may evolve, alter, or challenge the previously intended outcomes. Consequently, it requires periodic reviews to ensure that the strategy can cater for the new issues.

The dream and duty of any company form the primary communication stage towards the premeditated preparation course. Communicating the dream is important since it specifies the institution's long-term agenda by clarifying the basis for the its continuation and the desired ultimate position that it would like to attain. The mission on the other hand identifies major goals and performance objectives of the organisation (Cutright, 2001). The vision and mission are of critical value to the success of the strategic planning. It is worth noting that without a clear understanding of where the organisation is headed, no strategic plan can be successful.

The second most important communication step in an organisation's strategic planning process is the setting of a clear understanding of its environment, both internal and external. This environmental scan is performed through several communication models, of which the most popular ones are the SWOT and Porter's Five Forces Model. SWOT analysis is important in the identification of factors that are likely to affect the organisation's desired outcomes in its strategy (Goodall, 2009). The SWOT examination model identifies a business' interior powers and flaws, while at the same time identifying peripheral pressures and chances. This process is very important in the strategic planning process as it helps the organisation and other interested parties to understand the firm's distinctive competencies and key success factors. The main objective of SWOT analysis is mainly to ensure that the organisation's internal and external situations are well aligned

(Elbanna, 2008). The Porter's five-force plan is an essential business' strategic planning tool that guides the process of understanding the business' aggressiveness and appeal in its sector. These five forces include the risk of new entrants into the industry, degree of rivalry between competitors, threat of substitutes, consumer bargaining authority, and dealer bargaining supremacy (Lynch, 2000). A good communication strategy must consider these forces. It should have the potential to turn them into the organisation's advantage.

The third step is the gap analysis. In gap breakdown, the institution communicates the disparity between its present state of affairs and its required outlook. This process is very important since it identifies the needed resources and allocates them adequately to minimise the gap (Balogun, 2006). Igor Ansoff's model is a very important tool in the gap analysis process. Through the model, the organisation can be transformed from its current position while being guided by objectives, subjects, and its potential. The model stresses gap analysis and synergy, where the former evaluates the difference between the current and future positions, while the latter indicates the desire to seek a better product market posture and performance than its current standing.

The fourth communication step in strategic planning is referred to as benchmarking, which requires an organisation to measure and compare its operations, practices, and performance against others (Cummings & Worley, 2001). It is very important to establish a benchmark for identifying "best" practices that will ensure that the organisation's strategic planning objectives propel to a higher position than its competitors do.

The fifth step involves a serious consideration of what is referred to as emergent strategies. Emergent strategies indicate a consideration of unpredicted and unintended occurrences that differ and possibly alter the organisation's intended strategies (Goodall, 2009). Such a strategy is very important since it allows the organisation to respond accordingly to any

eventualities and thus ensure that regardless of the interruptions, the main strategic objectives remain on course and are achieved (Lynch, 2000). The sixth stage involves a close evaluation of strategies, action programmes, and tactics to ensure that they remain in the planned path towards the achievement of the strategic plans. In many instances, it is very important to measure performance at least annually (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). The approach is crucial in ensuring that the organisation can know the impact of its performance on the accomplishment of its assignment and dream. In the evaluation process, the organisation must always measure the current performance against the expected results while paying a close consideration to any changes that may have affected the journey towards the expected outcome. After the evaluations, the next step is a review of the strategic plan. It is important to ensure that the findings of the evaluation are incorporated into the strategic plan (Atkinson, 2006). It is important to effect various recommended changes from the evaluation process to ensure that the plans remain on their expected progress path and therefore increase the ability of the organisation to achieve its goals.

Benefits and Importance of Communication during Strategic Planning

As discussed above, strategic planning has gained prominence and significance in the management of both private and public sector organisations. In the academic institution setting, as universities adopt more and more corporate-like management approaches, communication will play an important role in maintaining a competitive advantage in their areas of operations, as well as ensuring the continuation of the social services that they offer in their respective spheres of operations, that is, in the academic world. Just like any other organisation, strategic communication serves various purposes in universities. Overall, it ensures that organisations clearly define their purpose, and hence leading to their setting of realistic goals and objectives that are in line with their mission.

The goals must be achievable in a given timeframe and within the organisation's capacity to implement them.

Strategic communication is highly beneficial to the organisation, firstly, as it allows a room for open and proper announcement of its goals and objectives to its stakeholders. In addition, it allows stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership of the organisation, as they know its success is pegged on their respective responsibilities. Without communication during strategic planning, organisations cannot ensure accountability concerning the use of the available resources. Consequently, the strategic planning is an important process since it ensures that resources are allocated where they deserve to ensure priority programmes are undertaken for the benefit of all stakeholders. Another important benefit is that communication allows an organisation to measure progress and/or put in place measures to guide organisational change (Balogun, 2006). It also ensures that the organisation identifies the best skills of various stakeholders, which go a long way in ensuring the success of various action areas of the strategic plan and the overall strategy.

Cutright (2001) puts forward a number of benefits that organisations stand to gain in the strategic communication process. Firstly, he notes that organisations can focus on important areas of activities and hence ensure that resources are prioritised for areas that provide the most benefit to the organisation. Secondly, it allows the organisation's management to analyse and clearly understand its internal culture and its influence on the success of the organisation's activities and performance. In addition, strategic communication ensures that an organisation is aware of its changing environment and hence a justification for its change on its processes to adjust accordingly (Sirat, 2010). It also helps an organisation in to determine the kind of change it wants and its actions to that effect. Since it involves a scrutiny of the organisation's present capacities, it is an important tool for determining opportunities and threats in its environment. An

organisation that lacks goals does not stand a chance in the competitive world of today. Universities cannot be exempted. In this case, through strategic communication, the organisation, can establish practical goals and aims that it can achieve with the available resources. It also acts as an important element when the organisation takes a scrutiny of itself and gives an opportunity to the top management to review strategic issues that arise. Further, it ensures that the need for better decision-making is emphasised. The organisation is also in a better position to manage and correct inconveniences in its processes. On the other hand, upon building on Cutright's assertions, Elbanna (2008) confirms that communication allows the organisation to establish an indicator for gauging the financial plan for its merchandise and services whilst achieving its short and long-term goals.

Barriers to Communication during Strategic Planning

The benefits of communication during strategic planning are obvious. It is advisable for every organisation to adopt communication in its management. However, this situation may not always be the case as the process itself may face various problems, which render communication ineffective and even the ultimate undoing of the organisation. However, public sector organisations are majorly reluctant in adopting these recommendations and devising the communication policies.

Firstly, the rapidly changing environment where organisations operate can easily render communication plans obsolete. To avoid this scenario, it is important to put in place monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for reviewing the strategies to ensure they remain relevant. However, this process is highly involving. Hence, many organisations are not ready to follow it. This situation leads to stagnation or even complete failure of the strategies when they become irrelevant (Howell et al., 2003). It is also important to note that managers often come in the way by being reluctant in terms of developing plans for themselves and their subordinates. In addition, many problems that often characterise the communication planning

process in public sector organisation can easily portray a negative image of the whole process (Balogun, 2006). Misappropriation of resources, lack of accountability, and outside negative influences can also affect the success of the strategic planning process. Any organisation that upholds communication is guaranteed of avoiding this situation from happening. For large institutions such as universities, strategic communications planning is a costly process in terms of time and money. This situation can affect the success of the process.

While the above problems seriously challenge the effectiveness and probability of success of strategic communication, the involvement or engagement of stakeholders holds the key to failure or success of the strategic planning process. Strategic planning requires the involvement of all stakeholders (Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). The stakeholders must understand and support the communications requirements and goals of the strategic planning for its success. In large institutions such as universities, there is the need for collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders (Atkinson, 2006). In this process, communication is very vital. It has to be applied in each step of the planning process. Without communication of the goals of the strategic planning, progress, and other key issues, strategic planning is likely to disintegrate and jeopardise an organisation's ability to remain relevant to the needs it serves in the society.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

As public institutions, universities involve organisational hierarchies and division of labour from the top management, middle management, subordinates, and other segments of its various units or departments. During this division of labour, supervisors or managers are the key custodians of information, which helps them in decision-making and controlling of various functions in the university in their respective spheres of influence (Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). Supervisors, as custodians of information, transmit information to the

subordinates who must receive and obey the contents of the information.

It is important for organisations to set well-functioning and interconnected communication channels that transfer information from internal and external influences of the organisations. Organisations must ensure that they receive information from their environment to inform decision-making (Elbanna, 2008; Atkinson, 2006). Through effective communication processes, they can manage, decide, and give feedback accordingly to ensure the formulation of a good strategic plan and its subsequent successful implementation. Communication is also an important process in establishing, maintaining, and even altering the organisational culture and climate (Lynch, 2000). When employees and stakeholders feel that they are adequately informed and/or can easily communicate to everybody in the institutions, the success of organisational activities becomes evident.

To have a winning strategic arrangement, an organisation must be ready to change from its current state to the new level where it wants to be and take the necessary steps towards the change. Strategic planning indicates a desire to change from the current to another situation that is desirable for the organisation's future. In this process of change, strategic planning often interferes with individual and organisational culture. These changes must be effectively managed to avoid resistance or other negative consequences that may not be in the best interest of the organisation. According to Howell et al. (2003), the process of strategic planning and effecting change must ensure an elaborate, comprehensive, and well-coordinated strategy that considers the cultural and communication aspects of an organisation.

Poor communication is the main hindrance towards successful strategic planning in universities. Firstly, the large number of stakeholders and interest groups on the welfare of universities means that much communication between these segments of the organisation is very vital (Cummings & Worley,

2001). For instance, it is important to ensure that the influences of government oversight authorities are well communicated and reflected in the strategic planning process. Without adherence to these requirements from the oversight bodies, the strategic plan may face serious problems, including illegalities that contravene the requirements of the law.

According to Balogun (2006), even the best-formulated strategies often fail due to poor implementation, which mainly arises from improper strategies that fail to communicate action points as required. Therefore, it is important to ensure that strategies are well communicated through the involvement of relevant stakeholders inside and outside the organisation (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). While the top leadership is responsible for the success or failure of the overall strategy, it is important for managers and supervisors to be empowered and/or encouraged to respond to opportunities in their respective departments (Elbanna, 2008). Such an empowerment will spill over to other employees who will be willing to take risks and try new ideas without the fear of reprisals. In public institutions, the success of the strategic planning process is highly dependent on how the strategy requirements are communicated by the organisation to all the concerned employees from the highest to the lowest.

Poor communication is a great hindrance to the dialogue as an important part of the learning process. Since strategic planning involves learning new concepts and ideas, communication is therefore an important part of ensuring that members of the organisation know how they can contribute to the strategic mission of the organisation (Goodall, 2009; Campell & Stonehouse, 2002). Employees' role in the success of the organisation cannot be overlooked. They are the vehicles through which the actionable parts of the strategic plan are carried. However, when they do not have a clear understanding of their respective roles in the achievement of the strategic plan, it becomes a major problem and a big hindrance to the success of the strategic plan. It is for the best interest of the organisation

to ensure that this group is well informed on issues relating to the strategy implementation.

CHAPTER FOUR: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Poor communication is a major factor that affects strategic planning in universities. The enormity of the institutions can hinder effective communication. To ensure there is good communication that works for any university, the following recommendations are highly desirable.

Communicating about strategic planning

Although stakeholders may have heard about strategic planning, they may not understand what it entails. The first step is to spread the word on strategic planning through various methods. When stakeholders are aware of what strategic planning means and entails, they are likely to embrace it once it is implemented in the organisation.

Open communication with the Planning team

In the university environment, developing strategic plans requires a close and wide involvement of all stakeholders. It is therefore crucial to ensure that the planning reflects all major stakeholders. Further, there is a need to ensure that all stakeholders are valued and that their inputs are well considered through open communication. Without this open communication, some members may be dissatisfied with the process, thus leading to disagreements that may not only delay the process, but also completely stop the strategic planning process.

Communication the role of each stakeholder

The wide nature of the university institutions requires a clear division of labour and responsibilities. The roles of the entire organisation can be controlled and managed from one segment. It is therefore important for the institution to delegate duties across various departments and/or put the strategic plans for each segment under the leadership of various individuals. These divisions of labour must be made in such a

manner that upholds communication for both related and unrelated departments to ensure uniformity and streamlining of their various activities to complement each other, thereby leading to the overall achievement of the organisational strategic planning goals and objectives.

Communication on the progress of various teams

The overall success of the strategic planning is pegged on the success of various individual teams in the organisation. The failure of one team can easily indicate breakdown of the whole process. By keeping an open communication between these teams, the organisation can ensure balanced progress. Besides, timely remedy of actions may be undertaken to correct any hindrances.

In conclusion, the management of universities has greatly evolved over the years. There is an increased move towards semi-public and semi-private management models to improve efficiency and effectiveness of their services in the 21st century. In this process, strategic planning has gained a lot of relevance in university management in helping them to set goals and processes for the achievement of their future aspirations. Issues such as the wide array of stakeholders and interest groups, political interferences, as well as the services that focus on the society declare strategic planning an often-complicated issue. Communication plays an important role in ensuring a clear understanding of the requirements of the strategic planning by all stakeholders, failure to which success becomes an illusion. It is therefore important to eliminate all barriers to effective communication that may affect strategic planning in universities.

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