

INFLUENCE OF GOVERNANCE PRACTICES ON PERFORMANCE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENTS IN KENYA: A CASE OF EMBU COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

The ratings of service delivery among County Governments in Kenya has been dwindling since their inception in the year 2013. The poor performance is attributed to poor practices in the execution of county functions. In addition, noncompliance with the set out guidelines and rules of county operation is an eminent debate in the corridors of both public opinion and government audit. It is against this background that the study sought to establish how governance practices influence performance of Embu County Government and how such relationship is moderated by government policies. The study was anchored on Upper-Echelons theory and agency theory. Descriptive survey design utilizing cross-sectional approach was used to implement the study. The targeted population was 248 Embu County workers comprising of Chief Executive Committee Members (10), Chief Officers (14), Directors/ Deputy Director (30), Ward Administrators (20) and 174 Village Administrators (Embu County Government, 2022). In obtaining a sample size of 148, Krejcie and Morgan Table of sample determination was used. Stratified random sampling was used in choosing respondents in other sub-populations. Yamane's proportionate allocation formula was used in assigning sample sizes in each sub-population. Raw data was obtained by means of structured Likert-type questionnaires and unstructured interview guide. Qualitative data was analyzed

qualitatively by means of transcription and coding, theme generation and summarizing. Data was presented in tabular form. The relationship between governance practices and performance of Embu County decreased in the following order: public participation ($r = 0.86$), strategic planning ($r = 0.76$) and leadership styles ($r = 0.50$). Thus governance practices were concluded to have significant influence on performance of Embu County. Introduction of government policies to the governance practices resulted into 1% variation in the performance of Embu County. This led to the conclusion that government policies had no significant moderation on the relationship between governance practices and performance of Embu County. The County Governments should ensure that strategic planning is adaptively focused on performance needs relative to the prevailing internal and external constraints. There is need for county governments to ensure that public participation is not only an event but also a process continuous and active involvement of public in order to develop the most informed and widely accepted decisions. County Government can develop leadership development training and development programme to empower public officers in meeting performance targets through effective integration of people and resources. Public officers can use the findings from this study to do self-assessment, learn and improve in their governance practices in attaining performance targets.

INTRODUCTION

In modern times, organizations are facing performance challenges due to competing needs. For instance, globalization has increased the demand for effective governance in the areas where governments are not able to cope with. Apparently, this necessitated the emergence of global institutions like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization and United Nations, among others organizations in order to deliver given services in more effective and responsive ways (Qoraboyev, 2021). As a result, global governance has facilitated development of relationships, mechanisms and process for integrating and coordinating responses to human needs at global level (Das, 2020). Thus, governance contributes to the achievement of performance requirements, stability and success of organization.

Governance is the general system and mechanism upon which administrations are controlled (Achim, Borlea & Mare, 2016). Landells and Albrecht (2019) describes governance as the framework of roles, rules, authorities, procedures decision-making processes, responsibilities and control mechanisms that organization use to achieving their long-term aspirations. In United States of America for instance, governance practices are defined within the regulatory, legal, ethical, competitive, democratic, societal and economic forces (Emmerich, Saitt, Niles & Wachtell, 2021). It is the responsibility of managers, boards and stakeholders to act in the best ways possible so as to guarantee the interests and welfare of all. In doing so, many entities have differing mechanisms that helps to define governance practices, all with an of mitigating and controlling potential threats and therefore align the peoples` behavior with the common interests. However, there is growing debate focused on whether the already established governance system and practices are streamlined to offer effective effects (Rose & Peiffer, 2018). This indicates the elusive nature of governance.

In Germany, governance practices assume a more conservative nature. For instance, good governance is controlled by the integrated mechanisms in which capital protection and transparency are shaped by the demand for equal and fair opportunities (Aude, Frank & Christian, 2020). Regulation of governance practices in Germany is anchored on the European and Germany Acts: like European Market Abuse Regulation, German Commercial and Corporate Governance Codes and Co-Determination Laws. These regulations make everybody in decision making structure to be held accountable for his or her actions so as to promote transparency and accountability. Still, Germany is claimed to face governance challenges related to transparency, reporting and corporate social responsibility which continue to hinder impactful results (Rapp & Strenger, 2015).

The Belarusian Corporate Governance Code provides the national standards for governance practices upon which other corporates generate own codes of practices in Belarus. Governance is strengthened through functional boards, disclosure and transparency rules, internal mechanism of control, empowerment of stakeholders` interest and rights and participation of shareholders (Cigna, Djuric, Kobel et al., 2017). Nevertheless, governance system in Belarus is still not effective in delivering the desired and expected results due to inconsistencies

between laws and some governance practices challenges that are not regulated (Council of Europe, 2019). For instance, there is little consideration of the ever-changing needs of stakeholders and international players in the already legislated regulations on good governance practices. Specifically, corruption is still a nightmare in Belarus.

In African states, there is increasing pressure from stakeholders for public institutions to enforce good governance practices with the stringent measures possible so as to promote accountability and responsive results. These good governance practices include but not limited to rule of law, participation, transparency, responsibility, accountability, effectiveness and efficiency which leads to equitable and responsive results (Surya, 2018). In order to boost good governance practices, the architect of governance structure in Africa is anchored on the African Governance Policy Framework with structures like the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government, African Peer Review Mechanism, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, New Partnership for Africa's Development among others (Coetzee, 2017). By enforcing this framework of good governance, Africans are able to hold their governments into accountable. Despite the enormous mechanism put in place to promote good governance in Africa, poor quality of governance is eroding the prospects for prosperous economic development, peace and stability (Crocker, 2019). For example, bad governance has increased the demand for jobs, reduction in inequality, fight on corruption, better infrastructure, better education and healthcare services. One of the main factors contributing to poor performance in Africa is inadequate linkages between states and the societies being governed (Ricardo & Harry, 2018). This reflects ineffectiveness the governance practices.

In Ghana, the corporate governance code (2002) provides impetuous for various regulators and stakeholders to take lead in promoting good governance. However, ineffective enforcement and compliance of the good practices has costed development in Ghana due sociocultural challenges relating to mismanagement and corruption (Olusegun, 2012). Also, blame is accrued to the ineffective legal system and poor public involvement. The situation in South Africa is different with the exception that governance is controlled by the statute, soft and common laws as well as the prevailing market forces (Davids & Kitcat, 2021). This triangulation of regulations provides flexible and robust framework for upholding good governance. Still, not all organizations that practice good governance are able to deliver the expected performances outcomes. For instance, delegated responsibilities are claimed to be the most mismanaged aspects of good governance due to loss of control and accountability (Khan & Pillay, 2019).

In the East African Community, good governance practices are stated to be the essential determinants of effective integration and prosperity of the Member States (Kanakulya, 2018). For this reason, the East African Community (EAC) is structured with governance organs like the Summit, Council of Ministers, Co-coordinating Committee, Sectoral Committee, East African Court of Justice, East African Legislative Assembly and Secretariat. In order to implement and increase responsiveness of the strategies, the Est African Community is further structured with specialized institutions with particular mandates on governance (East African Community, 2018). However, the EAC states continue to record slow rate of integration and

poor economic growth due to bad governance (United States Aid, 2021). It implies that the existing mechanisms of governance not effective in rendering the desired governance practices.

In Uganda, practices of good governance are anchored on the basic and universal values of honesty that creates the foundation of accountability, transparency, fairness and responsibility (Ssekiziyivu, Mwesigwa, Bananuka et al., 2018). The application of governance principles and concepts in Uganda are guided by the principles of leadership, sustainability and good corporate citizenship (Katto, Wanyama & Musaali, 2018). The aim being to create checks and balances for healthy equilibrium of responsibility and performance. It compels the managers to act to reposition most productive elements of governance in order to deliver prosperity while protection and promoting interests of stakeholders and shareholders. However, institutional circumstances and unstandardized approaches in the enforcement of governance rules has resulted into different outcomes between organizations. Perhaps due to contextual factors that influence conduct and behavior of people leading to variance in the behavior outcomes.

The Tanzanian constitution and Public Leadership Code of Ethics creates framework for the conduct and ethical requirements in public office. With the standards in place, governance practices have continued to receive scholarly and intellectual concern in Tanzania (Mhando, 2019). This is because standards are considered as essential instruments for gauging good governance and maintaining and enhancing public confidence. Regulators as well as policy and decision makers view application of governance practices as imperative step towards effective management of work behaviors. While effective transmission and application of governance values call for informed decision-making, the knowledge of the determinants that promote effective governance and performance is still limited in Tanzania.

Kenya just like other East African Countries has put in place governance mechanisms so as to promote socioeconomic development. For instance, the constitution of Kenya 2010 outlines the national values and the basic principles of good governance and the requirements of leadership and integrity for the management of public resources (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Good practices of governance can be learned from National Security Fund Kenya (NSSF) whereby effective leadership and oversight of internal audit and control processes coupled with employee education and communication are claimed to have significant contribution to the performance of the institution (Abdi, 2028). A related study on governance changes leading to improved performance in Bomet County supports that effective change control process, staff education, people involvement in governance has a positive bearing on the performance (Chepkoech, 2014).

The Kenya`s Constitution structures the government into three broad organs namely: executive, judiciary and legislature. In order to strengthen governance and increase responsiveness of the public services to the local communities, governance in Kenya is further structured with semi-autonomous 47 County Governments comprising of the three arms namely the county assembly, county executive and county public service board (Republic of Kenya, 2017). Nevertheless, the performance of County Governments is underrated as evidenced by stalled projects, inflated debts, poor service delivery, public complains, lack of accountability,

corruption, poor citizen participation in development processes (Mbithi, Ndambuki & Juma, 2018). Other empirical studies suggest that poor performances of county governments are due to increase in unethical work practices, ineffective human resource, management practices, infrequent performance evaluation and ineffective risk management practices (Mwendwa & Senelwa, 2019). But effective internal controls and audit, stakeholder participation, increased accountability and transparency increases performance of the county governments' in Kenya (Muthoka & Waswa, 2021). Questions arise on why the County Governments are not responsive in their operations despite the service-oriented structures of operations.

Ngigi & Busolo (2019) postulate that county Governments in Kenya are not delivering effectivity due to structural limitations. This supported by Nyaga & Nzulwa (2017) that lack of harmony and synergy among governance units in County Government was derailing service delivery. It is against this background that this study will investigate the influence of governance practices on the performance of County Governments in Kenya for the case of Embu County. Virtue and Rainey (2015) associate efficiency in organizations with robust governance practices through the balance of authority, responsibility and the power of decision-making. This is what Price (2018) describe as an effective governance-operating-model whereby the strategic aspirations of an organization are implemented through oversight, responsibilities and accountability. Farazmand (2019), views infrastructure of policies, procedures of decision making, control mechanism, reporting and communication as essential elements of effective public governance. Nevertheless, practices of governance are context driven. In the study, governance practices are constructed by three variables namely: strategic planning, leadership style and public participation. But Kagumu, Odhiambo & Waiganjo (2017) associate poor performance of counties with poor coordination of county functions. While the connection between institution's board-structure and performance is empirically established, governance policies relative to governance practices and organization performance is still scarce (Milena & Russell, 2018). For instance, public Governance is claimed to moderate the relationship between fiscal decentralization and the performance of county governments in Kenya (Mbau, Iraya, Mirie & Njihia, 2019). Thus, the present study perceived government policies as catalyzers to the performance of Embu County.

Embu County is one of the forty-seven counties in Kenya. Its bordering Counties are Kitui, Kirinyaga, Tharanithi and Machakos. Embu County five 4 sub-counties, namely Mbeere South, Mbeere North, Manyatta and Runyenjes. Further, Embu County is divided into 20 wards, 51 locations as well as 127 sub-locations (Embu County, 2019). According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics report of 2019 (KNBS, 2019), Embu County has a population of 608, 599 which is shared almost equally between the female and male gender.

Since its inception in 2013, the performance of Embu County has disappointed the expectations of majority who have great optimism in development prospects. For instance, the link between planning and achievement of the national goals has been questioned in Embu County (Republic of Kenya, 2019). Leadership wrangles have been witnessed between government arms of Embu County has crippled effective delivery of public service to the residents (Kanyua & Thiane, 2017). Further, audit report has questioned the Embu County over adequate

engagement of public in county decision making processes leading to level of accountability and responsiveness of public service (EACC, 2018). According to the EACC report of 2018, the Embu County can solve most of its governance challenges through compliance rules, regulations and laws. For that matter, the study perceived poor performance of Embu County as a result of poor governance practices and breakage of the laid down guidelines.

Past studies have revealed that most bureaucratic organizations fail due to low level of adoption of contemporary principles of governance (Oribu, 2020; Ogbo, Chibueze, Christopher and Anthony, 2015). But this finding lacks general inference due to contextual differences between organizations. Further, empirical evidence supports that most successful organizations have clear division of labor, competent staffs, good linkages, flexible approaches to problem solving and effective coordination (Ghazzawi & Cook, 2015). Nevertheless, this finding failed to take into consideration the role of policies in shaping the performance of the organization given the governance practices.

Thus, governance must be aligned to the clarity of purpose and roles, balance between people and task, balance between power and responsibility, adequate and viable resources, stability and adaptability to the environment (Karen, Gatenby, Agnew et al., 2016). This view is upheld by Korir & Kyule (2020) when they conducted a study to investigate the relationship governance structure and performance of county governments in Kenya and it was found that governance structure contributes to firm`s performance by enabling favorable linkages between internal and external environments. However, due to contextual and geographical limitations, the findings cannot be generalized across diverse setting. Thus, the current study sought to investigate the moderating influence of government policies on performance of Embu County, given governance practices.

Problem Statement

In Kenya, the performance of over 92% of County Governments is dwindling (Birisha, 2017). County Governments have inadequate resources, poor workmanship, role duplication, minimal accountability due to limited public participations, work interferences by National Government, structural overlaps, poor leadership and corruption (Oribu, 2020). According to the governance statistics from the International Budget Partnership Kenya (2020), Embu County has 32% budget transparency, 36% own-revenue collection, 20% public participations while the aggregate priority information sharing on development projects was 20%. Munene (2019) observes that Embu County performance ranking was 24 out of the 47 Counties with a Gross Domestic Product of 103,734 million Per Kenya Shilling. This is quite ironical given the rich economic resources in Embu County. Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission Report of 2018 associate Embu County with governance challenges leading to increased loss of accountability, poor oversight, loop holes in handling and decision-making with regard to resource utilization, vague, increased debts, pending bills, loss of commitment in duty. These challenges are detrimental not only to successful implementation of county integrated development plans (CIDPs) but also to the achievement of national aspirations as envisaged in Kenya`s Vision 2030.

Past studies have revealed that most bureaucratic organizations fail due to low level of adoption of contemporary principles of governance (Oribu, 2020; Ogbo, Chibueze, Christopher & Anthony, 2015). But this finding lacks general inference due to contextual differences between organizations. Further, empirical evidence supports that most successful organizations have clear division of labor, competent staffs, good linkages, flexible approaches to problem solving and effective coordination (Ghazzawi & Cook, 2015). Thus, governance must be aligned to the clarity of purpose and roles, balance between people and task, balance between power and responsibility, adequate and viable resources, stability and adaptability to the environment (Karen, Gatenby, Agnew et al., 2016). This view is upheld by Korir & Kyule (2020) when they conducted a study to investigate the relationship between governance structure and performance of county governments in Kenya and the finding was that governance structure contributes to firm's performance by enabling favorable linkages between internal and external environments. Nevertheless, this finding failed to take into consideration the role of policies in shaping the performance. Also, the contextual and geographical limitations limit generalization across population settings. The current study overcame the limitations by investigating the influence of governance practices on performance of Embu County.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to establish the extent to which strategic planning influences performance of Embu County

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical, empirical and conceptual framework was drawn to help establish what other researchers have carried out so as to build the gap that the current study was to fill. The study was anchored on the agency theory which identifies principals and agents who come together in a relationship that need to be managed to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Agency theory was developed by Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick in 1973 to emphasize on the need for managers` (agents) to serve diligently in order to meet the interests and expectation of the owners` (principal). Thus, Agency theory states that organizations exist to serve the interests of shareholders who not only own the organization but also have entrusted their resources and power with the managers (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). In resolving performance challenges therefore, managers should act in a manner that promotes efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of the of the inputs and resources. This calls for good practices in the management of organization resources and processes. Agency theory was useful when implementing the different governance mechanisms in order to control the management actions in an organization. Therefore, Agency theory is used to resolve management problems related to the delegated responsibilities from the owners. Policy guides, rules of conduct and ethical requirements are some of the organization mechanisms that help to trim conflicts of interests between the management and the owners. Agency theory calls upon managers to comply with internal control and procedures of operation in order to generate impactful results to the beneficiaries. There are past studies that have relied on agency theory

to discuss the impacts of corporate governance on the organization performance and success and the results are uncontested (Vargas-Hernandez & Teodoro, 2018; Phan & Duong, 2021). In the current study, Agency theory was used to discuss the role of government policies in shaping the practices of governance in order to generate more responsive results.

Empirical Review

This section presents the review of the past empirical studies related to the research variables namely: performance of County Government and strategic planning.

Performance of County Government

Performance is the rate at which achievement of set targets is realized after work is done and resources are used. Just like other organizations, a County Government is said to be performing when set objectives and goals are achieved. Performance of any government is essential in delivering sustainable public service. In Kenya, performance of public sector and County Government is embedded in the constitution of 2010. When measuring the performance of County Governments, the issue of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and compliance cannot be ignored (Stephen & Chidiebere, 2016). Other elements of performance in the County Governments include but not limited to transparency levels, accountability, customer satisfaction, livelihoods, poverty indexes (Ngigi & Busoro, 2019). The indicators of the performance of County Government have not been generalized due to contextual and geographical limitations. For instance, when assessing the relationship between strategy implementation and performance of Embu County, Nkatha (2018) used the indicators of efficiency and effectiveness. When exploring the effects of government of performance of County Government in Kenya, Njeri, Elegwa & Anthony (2018) used the indicators of citizen satisfaction, organization stability, new opportunities, accountability and transparency. Korir & Kyule (2020) examined the governance structure and performance of county governments in Kenya whereby the following indicators were used: cost reduction, lead time reduction and service delivery. The present study will integrate the measures of performance of Embu County from different related studies so as to increase the validity of the findings.

Strategic Planning and Performance of County Government

The existence, purpose and direction in which organizations aspire are justified and guided by their strategic mandates. According to Oludele (2021), strategic mandate is found to have positive contribution to the institutional performance in Nigeria. This is achieved through guidance on the establishment of the most efficient and effective operational frameworks. Strategic mandates sway organization performance in Saudi Arabia by clarifying the vision, mission, goals and linking them to resources (Aidhaheri, Ameen & Isaac, 2020). Further, Jonyo (2018) did a study to determine the effects of mission and vision on performance of Kenyan universities and strategic direction was found to have significant influence on organization performance in situations where budgetary and planning priorities are aligned with the strategic priorities. Thus, strategic mandates are considered essential factors of performance.

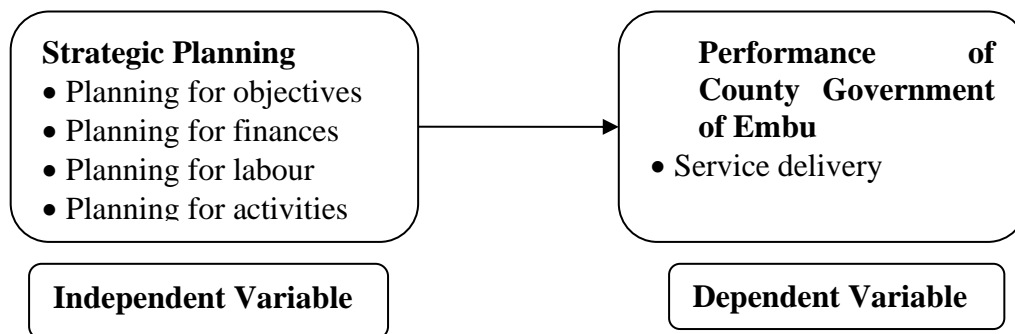
Oludele, (2021) did a study on the relationship between strategic planning and performance of public organization in Nigeria. While using descriptive survey, purposive sample size of 50 employees, Likert-scale questionnaires and interview guide, descriptive analysis and Chi square, the findings showed that strategic planning increases organization performance. However, the methodologically was limited to nonprobability sampling method and a small sample size of 50. Also, non-parametric tests were used which limited inferencing of results. The study used a large random sample size of 150 so as to overcome sampling biasness. Also, the study used parametric tests such as Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis for inferencing the findings. Finally, the findings from the study were anchored on Upper-Echelons theory and agency theory so as to enhance the validity.

In Bahrain, Aidhaheeri, Ameen & Isaac (2020) conducted a study on the effects of strategy formulation on public sector operations whereby strategy implementation was found to have significant and positive impact on organizational performance. While the study used quantitative design, structured questionnaire, purpose sampling of 403 respondents, descriptive statistics and partial least squares method, the findings had no theoretical basis. In addition, the study used non-probability sampling and non-parametric analysis which lowered inferencing. In the current study, proportionate stratified random sampling and parametric tests were used to promote generalization of the findings. In addition, Upper-Echelons theory and agency theory was used to discuss the findings on the influence of strategic planning on performance of Embu County.

George, Walker & Monster (2019) did desktop analysis on the influence of strategic planning on organization performance whereby strategic planning was found to affect effectiveness and performance of all organizations. Whereas the study employed qualitative design, meta-analysis, 31 empirical studies, 87 correlational analyses and grounded theory, use of secondary data and qualitative methodology lowered external validity. In the study, mixed methodologies was used when collecting raw data so as to increase validity for concluding the findings.

In Kenya, Nkatha (2018) did an evaluation study on how strategy implementation relates to the performance of Embu County Kenya. In that study, descriptive design, questionnaires, regression and Pearson correlation analysis used. The findings were that organization strategy increases chances of performance and firm success. Nevertheless, the study y Nkatha relied on quantitative data collected using structured questionnaires only. In addition, the study used resource-based, sequential thinking and holistic strategy implementation theory to explain the findings. In the study, both qualitative and quantitative raw data was collected using structured questionnaire and unstructured interview guide so as to boost internal validity for concluding the results. In addition, Upper-Echelons theory and agency theory was used when discussing the findings.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design adopting cross-sectional was used to implement the research inquiry. In the cross-sectional approach to the survey design, data is collected and analyzed from a given population at a given time and point so as to understand the existence of the problem being investigated (Kothari & Garg, 2014). This study targets a population of 248 employees comprising of the Chief Executive Committee Members (10), Chief Officers (14), Directors/ Deputy Director (30), Ward Administrators (20) and 174 Village Administrators (Embu County Government, 2022). The choice of the target population is informed by the fact that these categories of county staffing are in policy implementation positions and therefore ought to have a good understanding on the policy requirements for county to perform. In addition, these categories of employees are assumed to be fully conversant with the governance requirements when discharging their mandates in their County functions.

The targeted population was 248 Embu County workers comprising of Chief Executive Committee Members (10), Chief Officers (14), Directors/ Deputy Director (30), Ward Administrators (20) and 174 Village Administrators (Embu County Government, 2022). In obtaining a sample size of 148, Krejcie and Morgan Table of sample determination was used. Stratified random sampling was used in choosing respondents in other sub-populations. Yamane's proportionate allocation formula was used in assigning sample sizes in each sub-population. Raw data was obtained by means of structured Likert-type questionnaires and unstructured interview guide. Descriptive statistics namely: frequency, mean, percentage and standard deviation will then be generated. In addition, inferential statistics namely: correlational and regression analysis was computed. Specifically, Pearson correlation analysis was used to test relationship between individual independent variables (strategic planning, leadership style, public participation) and dependent variable (performance of Embu County). Multiple (R Correlation Coefficient) was used to test the relationship between the combined independent variables (strategic planning) or governance practices and dependent variable (performance of Embu County). Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis which involves transcription of statement, organizing the statements, coding the statements and generation of thematic orders for drawing patterns that link to the research objectives.

Results and Findings

A total of 278 structured questionnaires were administered upon which 201 were duly filled and retrieved. The response rate for the questionnaire at 83.1%. This finding fulfils the recommendation by Holtom, Baruch, Aguinis and Ballinger (2022) that for conclusive survey

findings the response rate should be more than 68%. The response rate for the interview guide is 66.7% which is above the generally accepted level of 50% for qualitative data collection instruments (Sunders, 2007). On gender, 66 (55.9%) of the respondents for the questionnaires were males and 52 (44.1%) were females. Out of the 4 respondents for the interviews, 3 (75%) were males and 1 (25%) were females. On age distribution, over 50 years were 56 (47.4%), 36-50 years were 35 (29.7%) and 19-35 years were 27(22.9%). All (100%) the respondents for the interviews aged between 36-50 years. On education, 46 or 39.0% of the respondents' college certificate, 34 or 28.8% of the respondents had just a secondary school certificate and 6 or 5.1% of the respondents had just a primary school certificate. All the respondents (100%) for the interview guide were university grandaunts.

Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

Strategic planning was an independent variable which was indicated by planning for objectives, finances, labour and tasks.

Descriptive Finding on Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

In answering to this item, respondents rated ten statements on a five-point scale starting from 5 for strongly-agree, 4 for agree, 3 for none, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly-disagree. The findings are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Findings on Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County

	Strongly-disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly-agree	n	Mean	Standard-deviation
The county strategic goals were very inspiring	0(0.0%)	2(1.7%)	3(2.5%)	69(58.5%)	44(37.3%)	118	4.31	0.61
Strategic priorities were given more attention	0(0.0%)	2(1.7%)	5(4.2%)	81(68.6%)	30(25.4%)	118	4.18	0.58
Implementation strategies were practical	0(0.0%)	2(1.7%)	4(3.4%)	76(64.4%)	36(30.5%)	118	4.24	0.59
Resources were rationally allocated	0(0.0%)	3(2.5%)	8(6.8%)	63(53.4%)	44(37.3%)	118	4.25	0.69
Staffing was done based on professional capabilities	0(0.0%)	8(6.8%)	8(6.8%)	69(58.5%)	33(28.0%)	118	4.07	0.78
Allocation of task was by people skills	2(1.7%)	5(4.2%)	6(5.1%)	47(39.8%)	58(49.2%)	118	4.31	0.88
Organization of activities and functions was result oriented	0(0.0%)	1(0.8%)	3(2.5%)	71(60.2%)	43(36.4%)	118	4.32	0.57
Coordination of activities was effective	0(0.0%)	3(2.5%)	4(3.4%)	66(55.9%)	45(38.1%)	118	4.30	0.66

Decision making processes were supported by evidence	0(0.0%)	3(2.5%)	8(6.8%)	63(53.4%)	44(37.3%)	118	4.25	0.69
There were periodic reviews of the implementation of strategic plan	0(0.0%)	3(2.5%)	4(3.4%)	66(55.9%)	45(38.1%)	118	4.30	0.66
Averaged						118	4.25	0.67

The data in Table 1 reveals that the averaged mean and standard deviation for strategic planning and performance of Embu County were 4.25 and 0.67 respectively. The averaged mean of 4.25 implied that most of the respondents were in strong agreement that strategic planning contributed to the performance of Embu County. The 0.67 value of the averaged standard deviation implied that there was no much variation of scores around the mean and hence data consistency. The statements that exceeded the averaged mean of 4.25 were: The county strategic goals were very inspiring, resources were rationally allocated, allocation of task was by people skills, organization of activities and functions was result oriented, coordination of activities was effective, decision making processes were supported by evidence and there were periodic reviews of the implementation of strategic plan. Those statement with scores below 4.25 were: strategic priorities were given more attention and staffing was done based on professional capabilities.

Relationship Between Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

The relationship between strategic planning and performance of Embu County, Kenya was determined using Pearson`s correlational analysis method and the findings are given in Table 2

Table 2: Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

		Performance of Embu County
Strategic Planning	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	n	118
	Pearson Correlation	0.77**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
	n	118

** . Correlation was significant at the 0.01 sign. Level for (2-tailed).

Table 2 indicates that the coefficient of correlation (r) between strategic planning and performance of Embu County, Kenya was 0.77 (p value equals 0.00 which is less than 0.05). This implied that strategic planning had a strong positive relationship with performance of Embu County.

Qualitative Findings on Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

The contribution of strategic planning on performance of Embu County was also raised during the interview with the County Executive Committee Members (CEC). For instance, when asked about the realistic nature of the strategic goals to the performance, all the CECs were affirmative that indeed, the strategic goals for the County were anchored on the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) and that the priorities focused on immediate County needs. As a result, resources including staffing and finances were aligned to ensure the best results in the shortest means possible. The summarized response is hereof:

“The strategic helped the County to capitalize in planning for the limited resources based on the prioritized areas. For instance, all activities and projects had to be integrated into the County strategy in order to attract funding. By doing so, it helped the County to capitalize on the existing strengths while exploiting the potential opportunities while overcoming internal challenges and defending against imminent threats. In addition, strategic planning enabled us (CECs) to track progress towards attaining the planned goals. All in all, the strategic planning helped to achieve the success of the County in meeting citizen needs while fulfilling its mandates of promoting local socioeconomic development” (Key Informant Interviewees).

Discussion on Strategic Planning and Performance of Embu County, Kenya

Under this theme, the main finding was that strategic planning has got significant influence on performance of Embu County. The evidence to support this finding is built on both correlational results and qualitative responses from the Key informant interviewees. The finding is in line with the findings by Oludele, (2021) when he set out to examine the influence of strategic planning and performance public organization in Nigeria whereby strategic planning was found to increase the performance. Similarly, Aidhahehi, Ameen & Isaac (2020) explored strategy formulation relative to the operations of public sector in Bahrain and the findings led to the conclusion that strategy implementation has a significant and positive impact to organizational

Performance. This finding is also coherent with the findings by George, Walker & Monster (2019) on study to establish the influence of strategic planning on organization performance where it was found that strategic planning affects effectiveness and performance of all organizations. The finding is further supported by the findings from an empirical study by Nkatha (2018) that organization strategy increases performance of Embu County. Upper-Echelons theory supports this finding in that outcomes from any organization depends on the strategic decisions, choices and the commitment to perform (Carpenter, Geletkanycz, & Sanders, 2016). Agency theory was useful in supporting the finding that effective organizations build their strategies on solid reality of the existing needs (Altawalbeh, 2020). Hence, strategic planning helps to build a feasible and logical approach towards attaining the long-term performance needs for an organization.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The findings from the descriptive analysis showed that strategic planning contributes to the performance of Embu County. The correlational results showed that strategic planning has got significant influence on the performance of Embu County. Also, the findings from content analysis showed great attribute of strategic planning on performance of Embu County. Strategic planning helped to shape what was done in line with the prevailing circumstances.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, governance practices are concluded to have significant influence on the performance of Embu County. Specifically, strategic planning is concluded to be a critical governance practice that ensures that performance goals are set out from broadly in order to guide on setting of performance objectives, developing of tasks and allocation of finances and labour.

Recommendations

Strategic planning was found to be an important governance practice that persuades performance. The County Governments should institute appropriate reforms and change in governance practices in order to render the best results in their operations. For example, strategic planning need not be a one-time event but should be reviewed and monitored regularly in order to accommodate the dynamic performance and public needs. This should be done deliberately so as to exploit institutional strengths while converting the external threats into opportunities.

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