STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN AFRICAN CONTEXT: DOES ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES INFLUENCE THE RELATIONSHIP?

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of the study was to determine whether ethical practices and organizational structure influence the relationship between strategic leadership and service delivery of County Governments in Kenya. The findings would aid the audit, review and strengthening of existing policies aimed at ensuring good ethical practices in public entities. The relevant theories reviewed for this study were the New Public Management (NPM) theoretical perspective, upper echelon theory, institutional theory and principal agent theory. This study used a positivism research philosophy. The study used a cross sectional survey. The target population for the study was drawn from the 47 Counties in Kenya as per 2010 constitution. The study used both primary and secondary data which were collected using questionnaires, interviews and desk review. Data analysis took place at two levels – descriptive statistics level and inferential statistics level. The study found that the entire hypothesis tested were statistically significant and thus supported by the study. It was therefore recommended that county governments must understand the service delivery dimensions in order to carry out frequent analysis and develop strategic leadership concepts relevant to their counties.

Key words: Strategic leadership, Organizational structure, Ethical practices and Service delivery

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic leaders have to contend with proper organizational structure in place and acceptable ethical behaviour to achieve desired results which in the case of public entities such as counties relate to service delivery. The study thus conceptualises that quest for satisfactory service delivery in public entities is interlinked with strategic leadership, ethical practices and organizational structure and faces varied challenges (Van Rooyen, 2008). Strategic leadership concept therefore emanates from the contention that good leaders are tied around strategies, good organizational structure in place and ethical practices in enhancing service delivery in public entities (Allio, 2015).

Strategic leadership is defined as the interaction between leaders and their followers and how such leaders influence the said followers in pursuing certain organizational goals through exchange and application of

individuals' tacit and explicit knowledge in a certain thinking pattern to enhancing service delivery (Judge, 2012). Ethical practices constitutes moral principles that are deemed to guide the officials in an organization in work related aspects which controls conflicts of interest and abusing of positions or offices by the individuals in hierarchical positions (Bubble, 2012). Organizational structure involves the architectural representation of the leadership, relationships that are functional and talent within an organization workforce. Bass (2007) referred to service delivery as a bundle of customers or the things that offered or enhanced value or utility to such a customer.

The emphasis that strategic leaders are visionary by description requires the ability to strike a balance between short-term and long-term organization obligations (Rowe, 2001). The study posits that strategic leadership possesses unique personality traits, skills and management styles which they apply to the context of the organisations they lead. Strategic leaders defines key and crucial organizational strategic change moments, creates appropriate strategies and translates such strategies to actions in operational terms for the change direction required (Mulcaster, 2012). This is important for any organization that is obligated to achieve the desired goals as far as key stakeholders interests are taken in to the equation.

Service delivery concept is derived from the process of providing satisfactory services. The service delivery concept has been defined in many different ways. Bass (2007) referred to it as a bundle of customers or the things that offered or enhanced value or utility to such a customer. This study argues that 'service delivery' as a variable is widely used in developmental studies in the public sector. Service delivery in public entities is defined by political promises and commitments by the government agencies and other political players whose credibility is largely shaky (Keefer, 2004). It is therefore necessary to assess service delivery of county governments in Kenya on the perspective of performance measures which are deemed to have direct effect on the operation and efficiency to the citizens who receive the services. Therefore, it's useful to adjust the structure to accommodate both strategic leadership roles and the associated ethical practices in the public organizations in order to facilitate better service delivery to the citizens.

2. MATERIALS

The relevant theories reviewed for this study were the New Public Management (NPM) theoretical perspective, upper echelon theory, institutional theory and principal agent theory. Theoretical assumptions, their critique and how they relate to the study variables were well articulated. The new public management theory advocates application of private sector's best practices for efficient and responsive service delivery by public entities (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Hope, 2001; Savoie, 2003). Therefore, the NPM perspective key tenets as put forward by Haque (2004) and Islam (2015) align with the objectives of this study whose drive is the quest for better services by public entities by a strategic leadership which is ethical. The proposed study hypotheses hold that strategic leadership, ethical practices and service delivery concepts have been applied successfully in the private sector and thus the need to test how they fair in public entities on the basis of NPM.

As noted by Aziz et al. (2015), NPM identifies the need for leadership which undertakes strategic planning while upholding values such as professionalism, fairness and responsiveness to public needs, issues which

the study sought to understand how they relate to service delivery. The study conceptualizes situation where the public are treated as private sector customers who desire quality and satisfactory service.

 The premise aligns with the NPM perspective which emphasizes on competition, quality services and customer satisfaction as desired outcomes in the public sector (Haque, 2007). The flexibility of NPM perspective to diverse conceptual and contextual adaptations also makes it suitable for this study which was based on county governments in Kenya which possess unique characteristics distinct from the Eurocentric or Western public sector models.

The Upper Echelon Theory (UET) as developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) view strategic organizational processes and outcomes as a product of managerial qualities of topmost managers. Hambrick and Mason's (1984) as well as Hambrick's (2007) arguments are a basis for this study which also holds that styles (such as strategic leadership) and top leadership qualities (such as ethicality) shape the services offered by county governments.

The central tenet of the upper echelon theory is that, organizations are a reflection of the skills, expertise and values of the senior leaders as they work at a strategic level (Chuang, Nakatani & Zhou, 2009; Phipps & Burbach, 2010; Mason & Reilly, 2006). The assertion is similar to the study's main objective which supposes that an ethical strategic leadership can influence the services provided by public entities such as county governments.

This theory provides a framework within which the role of strategic leaders in influencing organizational outcomes can be interpreted, the key postulation being that organizational outcomes and strategic decisions are partially predicted by strategic leaders (Carpenter et al., 2004. The propositions by the upper echelon theory have brought forth significant literature in research of the role of strategic leadership and service delivery. Strategic leaders are therefore critical in yielding quality service delivery of public service organizations. This theory guides the conceptualization of strategic leaders in influencing service delivery in the context of county governments in Kenya.

Institutional theory assumptions are founded on the argument that organizations are operated under a certain structure that takes in to consideration both social, environmental and internal performance goals and objectives (Cohen et al., 2007). This therefore demand the ability of strategic leaders to ensure that goals and objectives are formulated in line with the structure in place to avoid inefficiencies in operations. It calls for understanding of norms and processes of the organizations both traditional and new changes that may facilitate strategy implementation processes.

According to Weir et al. (2002) organizational structure is linked to the concept of institutional theory. The theory explains the deeper and more resilient aspects of structure, processes, schemes, rules, norms and routines that have become established as authoritative guidelines for the organizational behaviour and also integrate the financial structure and capital structure which are key to strategy implementation.

The theory also looks at how organizational structure are created, diffused, adopted and adapted over space and time, and how they fall into decline and disuse but fails to clearly show the applicability in organizations especially during strategic leadership decision making process (Markiewicz, 2011). It is therefore asserted that the choice of processes and structures of an organization is reflected on external institutions that prefer such choice. There are rules and other beliefs that should be rewarded in well-

coordinated economic transactions based on strict adherence to the set structures (Hinton, 2012). The paper applies institutional theory to underpin the concept brought out in the literature review concerning the applicability of organizational structure in adding on the concept of strategy implementation.

The agency theory, also referred to as the principal-agent model, is applied in the organizational and strategic management publications as a framework for setting up and managing contract arrangements and explains the behaviours of principal and agent (Eisenhardt, 1989). The theory focuses on ethical practice and accountability mechanisms to correct opportunistic behaviour that result from principals exploiting asymmetric information to the disadvantage of the agents (Heath, 2009).

Strategic leaders, employees, suppliers and customers/citizens among others are the actors whose interactions lead to agency problems which have to be resolved. Given that strategic leaders have both the ability to commit public entities to contracts transactions they deem appropriate while the responsibility sits on the public as the taxpayers and consumers of public goods and services, there is need to ensure that this is done ethically and with accountability in line with the tenets of the principal agent theory (Crowther & Jatana, 2005).

In agency theory, as noted by Northouse (2013) a principal decides to engage an agent due to cost considerations and expertise. In the public entities' context of the study the citizens act as the principal while the leadership acts as the agents who manage scarce resources to deliver satisfactory services (Van Essen, 2011). Further, once elected the leaders in the public sector assume principal role and appoint/hire staff who become agents on their behalf. The agency theory is relevant to this study as it explains the interactions between various actors in the public service delivery whose components including leadership and ethics.

The underlying purpose of any public institution is the effective and efficient delivery of public services. Ethical practices, organizational structure and strategic leadership enable public sector entities in their pursuit of excellence in the service delivery outcomes (Robbins, 2008). Strategic leadership focuses on undertaking tactical approaches where ethical practices and organizational structure direct the behaviour of the strategic leaders towards the accomplishment of the organisation's objectives, thus attaining better service delivery (Schutte et al., 2014).

It is vital to note that decentralized kind of structure is necessary and important since it generates more levels of business units which are good at decision making and also allows ethical practices adherence from one unit to the next (Gupta & Michailova, 2004). According to Public Service Commission (2008) strategic leadership that is based on ethics rather than position and is structured around strategic leadership is a key building block for overall service delivery and public confidence in government institutions and leaders in general is one of the other jointly linked to strategic leadership, ethical practice organizational structure.

Siphumeze (2015) found that strategic leadership can play a great role in facilitating service delivery. This can be facilitated by better organizational structures in place coupled with the internal measures that facilitate ethical practices. The study by Masungo and Marangu (2015) found that strategic leadership has significant positive effect on service delivery and suggested that better structures should be put in place to monitor the process of service delivery. It is therefore necessary that organizational structure that supports ethical practices to be enforced by strategic leaders to guarantee better service delivery.

3. METHODS

The target population for the study was drawn from the 47 Counties in Kenya as per 2010 constitution The study selected participants based on how the study deems their input necessary to accomplish the objectives of the study and also their availability during data collection period. The County Public Board establishes fourteen departments upon which all counties should be based in establishing their respective departments. However, each county is allowed to establish departments as guided by the county's service charter as per the citizens needs in that particular county and therefore each county has a varied number of departments. The study purposively selected six departments which were common across all the counties and offers services which are the same in all the counties that is, Education, Health services, Public works, Economic planning, Natural resources and Agriculture. Chief Officers and administrators were selected to participate in the study since they were directly involved in the service delivery process and capable of giving information especially on strategic leadership and service delivery.

The study used primary data collected using questionnaires. A close-ended questionnaire was used to collect primary data relating to the all variables. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to collect views of respondents on the manifestations of strategic leadership and service delivery. The questionnaire adopted a 5-likert scale. The use of 5-likert scale made it possible to quantify the qualitative data, and therefore, enable the attainment of more objective results regarding the views of respondents on the different manifestations. Before administering the data collection instrument, respondents were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity regarding their responses. The questionnaire was administered using the 'drop and pick up later' method so as to allow the respondents ample time to respond to the questions, thereby enhancing accuracy in responses and improve response rate.

4. RESULTS

The study determined the joint effect of strategic leadership, organizational structure and ethical practices on service delivery through the hypothesis that; the combined effect of strategic leadership, organizational structure and ethical practices on service delivery of county governments in Kenya is different from their independent effects on the same variable.

This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 2

Table 2: Regression Results of the Joint Effect of the Strategic Leadership, Organizational Structure and Ethical Practices on Overall Service Delivery

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	Strategic leadership	.585a	.342	.340	.38402
2	Joint-Strategic leadership, organizational structure, ethical practices	.830	.688	.668	.39410

(a) ANOVA

Model			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Strategic leadership	Regression	37.526	1	37.526	254.469	.000a
		Residual	72.260	271	.147		
		Total	109.786	272			
2	Joint-Strategic leadership, organizational structure, ethical practices	Regression	116.116	3	5.372	34.586	.000
		Residual	107.300	269	.155		
		Total	223.416	272			

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	1.335	.108				12.333	.000
	Strategic leadership	.473	.030	.585			15.952	.000
2	(Constant)	1.656	.596		-2.778	.008		
	Strategic leadership	.741	.188	.383	3.933	.000	.700	1.429
	Organizational structure	.188	.125	.174	7.100	.000	.558	1.791
	Ethical practices	.820	.145	.803	.830	.001	.430	2.326

Predictors: (Constant), Strategic leadership, organizational structure, Ethical practices
Dependent Variable: Service delivery

The study findings in Table 2 indicate that the joint effect of strategic leadership, organizational structure and ethical practices explain 68.8% of the variation in service delivery (R^2=0.688, F=34.586, P<0.05). The remaining 31.2% is explained by other factors not considered in the study.   It is clear from the value of R^2 =.668 and F ratio that the regression model was fit for use in the analysis.   Therefore, strategic leadership, organizational structure and ethical practices have a significant joint influence on service delivery and hence can jointly be used to predict service delivery.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study determined the joint effect of strategic leadership, organizational structure, ethical practices and service delivery among county governments in Kenya.   Strategic leadership that is based on ethics rather than position and is structured around strategic leadership and thus a key building block for overall service delivery and also argues that public confidence in government institutions and leaders in general is in one

of the other jointly linked to strategic leadership, ethical practice organizational structure. It was found that strategic leadership can play a great role in facilitating service delivery. This can be facilitated by better organizational structures in place coupled with the internal measures that facilitate ethical practices. The underlying purpose of any public institution is the effective and efficient delivery of public services. Strategic leadership has significant positive effect on service delivery but suggested that better structures should be put in place to monitor the process of service delivery. It is therefore necessary that organizational structure that supports ethical practices to be enforced by strategic leaders to guarantee better service delivery.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study demonstrate that the variables considered are important in a developing country and that it helps in identifying theories unique to county governments and enhances how conceptualization of the variables are important in building further on these variables. The study has demonstrated that county governments do operate in a situation where service delivery is expected by the citizens and therefore need to apply various leadership paradigms. The agency theory and institutional theory have also been supported in that the county governments are supposed to act on behalf of the national government and deliver to the agenda. These study findings statistically confirmed that significance to support the proposition.

The results of the study show that organizational structure has significant influence on the strategic leadership dimensions that counties can apply. The findings that ethical practices and organizational structure give better service delivery in line with strategic leadership are areas which counties need to focus their efforts. They need to strengthen their structures in place, enforce ethical practices and get best leadership acumen in an effort to give best services to the locals. It will create a clear road map on how service delivery will be achieved. The results of this study will assist policy makers to ensure county governments give correct and timely data on drafted policy decisions.

The findings that organizational structure moderates the relationship between strategic leadership and service delivery certainly make their work easier. The positive effects have higher contributions to the service delivery and this implies that county officers should concentrate not only on monitoring the ethical behaviours but also on building on the areas that impact on service delivery including better structure. This should form the basis of how organizational structure have to be observed by the counties if it has to succeed. They should not pay excessive attention to one factor as the service delivery is imperative.

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