

Rethinking Stakeholder Participation in Strategic Planning Processes: A Case of Zimbabwe's Colleges of Education.

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Abstract

This study investigated stakeholder participation in strategic planning processes in three teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted within the qualitative research methodology. Three colleges of education were purposively sampled. All principals in the sampled sites took part in the study. Two Heads of Departments (HODs), two Lecturers in Charge (LICs) two Students Representative Council (SRC) members as well as College Advisory Council Board Members (CACBM) participated in this study. A total of 18 informants participated through interviews. Documents such as strategic planning minutes were scrutinized. Strategic planning meetings were also observed at two sites. The findings were that the practice of strategic planning still appears to be rigid and bureaucratic for organizations that operate in rapidly changing environments such as those in Zimbabwe. Secondly, participation in strategic planning is not all inclusive; only a select few individuals do take part in the planning exercise. Colleges of education and the Ministry focus on the product activities, that is, crafting the strategic plan. They seem to ignore the process activities such as reviewing plans periodically and taking note of key performance indicators which promote continuous improvement. The study also found that participants received no formal training in strategic planning and that the planning process was skewed towards control and compliance; and exhibited managerial accountability tendencies which lie within central bureaucratic approaches. The study recommends that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the Department of Teacher Education, at the University of Zimbabwe, in consultation with relevant stakeholders should develop norms and standards for teacher education to align Zimbabwe's stakeholder participation in strategic planning to the global trends. Colleges should supplement their understanding of operational contexts by exploring possible future trends and circumstances. The criteria for reviewing strategic plans should be developed by peers, and practitioners in the field, in consultation with national norms and standards for teacher education.

Introduction

In their quest for systematic and logical means to improve operations, administrators of higher education institutions have utilized strategic and academic assessment plans as a tool for institutional and individual development. Both strategic and assessment plans are meant to be measurable, to validate success and identify areas that need improvement (Bush, 2003).

The need for the utilization of strategic and assessment plans has led to the concept of strategic planning. The perceived benefit of strategic planning as noted by Glaister and Falshaw (1999) is that it improves the performance of the institution. Thus it is a critical element that both shapes and gives direction to line ministry and institution operations. The other benefit is that it leads to indirect improvements in performance by improving the effectiveness of management throughout the process of strategic planning (Bryson, 2011). For example, the participation of stakeholders in the planning process aids management to work collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders. However despite the noted benefits, strategic planning has its critics.

Historically, as strategic planning became established as a discipline in its own right, its theorists and practitioners began to develop alternative models based on their observation and experience in schools and colleges (Bush, 2011). Theories that have been developed have, in a way, made inroads into reducing the role of central governance in planning and providing education. The developments of these theories have, in a way, led to a shift in leadership styles, whereby participative methods have received much attention (Bryson, 2011; Lane, 2005).

Although some educational functions are decentralized even within centralized systems, and others are centralized even within decentralized systems, the strategic planning process still faces some challenges (Lumby, 2003; Kariwo, 2007; Richards, 2010). Such challenges include engaging the right people in the planning process. In referring to the engagement of the right people, Mintzberg (1994) contends that they must be the analytic and convergent type of thinker and also be dedicated to bringing order to the organisation. Lumby (2003) asserts that the other challenge that strategic planners face is the need to get people with different backgrounds, interests and perspectives to agree on the direction the organization should take. Perhaps the greatest challenge for strategic planners in any environment is the level of involvement of senior and middle managers, lecturers and students in the strategic planning process.

The participation of stakeholders in strategic planning for their institutions appears to involve the crafting of plans from what is produced by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education as the national strategic plan (Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, National Strategic Plan 2005-2009). In a way, the colleges are forced to follow what is centrally planned and, as such, appear to be constrained in ensuring the full participation of students, lecturers, college advisory board members and other stakeholders in developing as unique institutions of excellence in teacher education (Kariwo, 2007). In a related study, Middlewood and Lumby, (2004) aver that such an environment might further constrain these institutions in independently scanning their environment in the strategic planning process. Such an environment might further constrain improved quality, internal efficiency and the capacity to maintain a competitive edge (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Abu-Duhou, 1999; Bush, 2003). The significance of this is that it shows the reversal of the flow from an input-driven model to a centrally determined output-driven and centrally controlled model of education (Davies and Ellison, 2004). This

may result in considerable tensions about what should constitute stakeholder participation, strategic planning and local management (Davies, 2006).

In light of the foregoing, the strategic planning process in teacher training institutions appears to have constraints. As a result there is need to investigate the emerging trends and particular realities confronting managers and leaders of higher educational institutions not only in Zimbabwe but in the whole of Southern Africa (Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge and Ngcobo, 2008). Invariably, principals and a few select members craft the vision and mission statements, which means that there might be challenges in the participatory processes. There could still be challenges in strategic planning that do not seem to encourage participatory or collaborative strategic thinking. It is in this context that this study aims to look at strategic planning approaches with the view of developing participatory leadership strategies. In the absence of participation by, for example, lecturers, it is likely that there will be tension between compliance and performance (Bush, 2003; Davies, 2006). In any context, excessive compliance reduces the scope for creativity and limits performance (Davies and Ellison, 2004). This also puts undue emphasis on outcomes, with processes having to be ignored.

Therefore, the need seems to exist for research to be carried out on stakeholder (lecturers, students and college advisory board members) participation in the strategic planning process.

Statement of the problem

Stakeholder participation is viewed as another way of encouraging individuals within the organization to engage with each other to build strategic understanding and enhance the strategic capability of the organization (Davies, 2006). The benefits of participation in strategic planning are that it helps facilitate communication and judgement. However, in Zimbabwe, despite the reforms that seek to move education from centralized planning characterized by bureaucratic tendencies to decentralization, the process of strategic planning appears to be still rooted in centralized bureaucratic models (Kariwo, 2007). As such, there is need for research on the nature of participation of lecturers and college advisory board members in the strategic planning process, with the view of recommending intervention measures that promote participatory institutional autonomy as well as encourage full participation by these actors.

Theoretical framework

The seminal theoretical work on the subject of community participation was first done by Arnstein (1969). The particular importance of Arnstein's work stems from the explicit recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy of citizens, through to consultation, and to what we might now view as genuine participation, i.e. the levels of partnership and citizen control. Bovaird (2007) asserts that while Arnstein famously pointed out the question of degrees of involvement many years ago, it remains a perplexing

problem. Although, arguably somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Arnstein's Ladder continues to be cited by planners. This indicates that it resonates with planners as an effective way of characterizing levels of public participation.

Although it might be seen as an effective public participatory way, Callahan (2007) points out that those who express caution and concern about direct citizen participation raise the following concerns: it is inefficient, time-consuming, costly, politically naïve, unrealistic, and disruptive, and it lacks broad representation. In addition, critics argue that citizens lack expertise and knowledge; are motivated by their personal interest, not the public good; and citizens can be passive, selfish, and apathetic, as well as cynical (Callahan, 2007). A study on public participation by Bovaird (2007) states that the above differences reflect the competing perspectives on democratic and administrative theory, as well as some of the contradictions inherent in contemporary society. On the lower rungs of this ladder are *manipulation*, *therapy*, and *placation* of the public, then the more positive activities of *informing* and *consultation*; on the higher rungs, we find *partnership* and eventually even *delegated power* and *citizen control*. However, Bovaird (2007) argues that this ladder disguises the complexity of provider–user relationships

The rungs of the ladder according to Bailey and Grossardt (2006) measure the difference between where public participation in strategic planning is situated in the public eye, and where it should be in the eyes of the respondents. While it is clear that the situation is not ideal, it is interesting to note that actual public confidence in these processes is not in fact at rock bottom as indicated by the terminology manipulation and therapy. It falls somewhere between informing and consultation. One issue with public confidence in planning and design processes, is the very long timeframe over which trust is built, and the relatively short timeframe over which it can be eroded by unresponsive or poorly designed public involvement.

Lane (2005) argues that the limitations of Arnstein's framework are obvious. The argument centres on the fact that each of the steps represents a very broad category, within which there are likely to be a wide range of experiences. For example, at the level of 'informing' there could be significant differences in the type and quality of the information being conveyed. In the case of internal and external stakeholders, colleges might decide to withhold part of the information to students but share the whole information with other stakeholders. Realistically therefore, levels of participation are likely to reflect a more complex continuum than a simple series of steps. The use of a ladder also implies that more control is always better than less control. However, increased control may not always be desired by the community and increased control without the necessary support may result in failure or more complex situations (Collins and Ison, 2006). In this instance, stakeholder participation in strategic planning might mean decentralization and devolving of power thereby creating a need for the support of this innovation. On the other hand, Eskeland and Filmer, (2006) indicate that participation in strategic planning may play a role even if colleges are owned and operated by a far-away national or provincial government.

Since Arnstein (1969), increasingly complex theories of participation have been advanced and new terminology added. In particular, the newer intervention has been a shift towards understanding participation in terms of the empowerment of individuals and communities. This has stemmed from the growing prominence of the idea of the citizen as consumer, where choice among alternatives is seen as a means of access to power. Under this model, people are expected to be responsible for themselves and should, therefore, be active in public service decision-making.

The Main Research Question

What is the level and nature of the participation by senior and middle managers, lecturers, students, and college advisory board members in the strategic planning process at Zimbabwe's colleges of education?

Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology because of its idiographic nature. The researcher was able to look at small groups in their natural settings using multiple (in-depth) case studies. The researcher also concentrated on a few selected colleges of education. The basic data collection instruments that were used in this study were interviews, observation and documentary analysis. In this study, the case study was chosen simply because it would allow the researcher to get at the inner experience of participants to determine how meanings were formed and to discover rather than test variables (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In this study, the researcher attempted to understand how participants related and interacted with each other during the strategic planning process. The case study as a research design was able to highlight the how and why of a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin, 2003) as well as cover the logic of the research design, data collection techniques and approaches to data analysis.

Population

This study targeted all the 14 teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe but then purposively selected three colleges from among the 14 teachers colleges to form the sample. This implies that a total of 3 purposively selected sites were involved in the study. The selected sites represented a 21.4% of the total of teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling involves selecting subjects because of some characteristic they poses (Briggs and Coleman, 2007). The purposive selection of the colleges is justified in this study because there was a set of criteria that was followed in the selection of the schools as follows:

- i. The researcher was interested in stakeholders who had attended strategic planning meetings and processes. As a result, purposive sampling helped to select colleges that had stakeholders who had attended strategic planning sessions.

- ii. Purposive sampling helped to target colleges that could be reached without too many hassles and too much cost.

Flick (2006) asserts that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Purposive sampling entails selecting organizations, individuals or groups for their relevance to the study being carried out (Briggs and Coleman, 2007). Thomas and Nelson (2001:281) also state that 'convenience sampling is used in some case studies because the purpose of the study is not to estimate some population value, but to select cases from which one can learn most'. This implies that sampling should be done for the explicit purpose of obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer research questions.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in this study. The researcher was able to collect information from a sample of the population considered to be information-rich and also representative of the population under study. Maree (2007) asserts that purposive sampling is mainly used so that individuals are selected because of some defining characteristic that make them the holders of the data needed for the study.

Data collection and analysis

The main goal of qualitative analysis is to organize data into a meaningful set of patterns, categories, and themes (Kalof, Dan and Dietz, 2008). Words, phrases, tone, non-verbal communications and the context of comments, among other aspects of the texts, are analysed. Briggs and Coleman, (2007) also argue that the first decision to be made in analysing interviews is whether to begin with the case analysis or the cross-case analysis. In this study, data analysis was approached by treating each case as comprehensively as possible on its own followed by a cross-case analysis. The researcher abided by ethical considerations as contained in Kalof, Dan and Dietz (2008) and the Faculty of Education Handbook of Post Graduate Qualification Policies and Procedures, 2009. The researcher had ensure that there was no identification of names.

The study began the process of data analysis by transcribing verbatim audio taped interviews. The results were cross-checked with the participants. The raw data from the interviews were coded so as to come up with data sets. Responses were treated according to the research questions the respondents were responding to. The study also referred to the transcriptions and cut and pasted the data listed under each research question. By so doing the researcher was able to compile data sets for each research question. The study also came up with inductive themes related to each question. The same process was used to analyse data obtained through observations and document analysis.

Qualitative data collected from the interviews were analysed following these steps. (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005),

1. Organising and categorising data.
2. Interpretation of every instance
3. Identification of patterns, that is, classifying information into sub-themes and sub-categories
4. Synthesis and generalisation of information obtained

Nieuwenhuis, cited in Maree (2007) states that qualitative data analysis is an on-going process the implication being that data collection, processing, analysing and reporting are intertwined. They are not merely a number of successive steps.

In this study, the sample consisted of college principals/vice principal, heads of departments and lecturers in charge. Two heads of department, two lecturers in charge, one college board member and the principal or vice principal from each college formed the sample. All participants were considered information-rich as they were directly involved in the strategic planning processes in their respective sites. Respondents were selected purposively from the purposively selected sites.

Results and Discussion

Participation in strategic planning

The study established which stakeholders participate in strategic planning in the selected sites. These, according to the findings, were the lecturers, LICs, HODs, Vice principals and the Principals. In all the sites, the strategic planning team comprised a few selected members who were selected by college management. Differences were noted when it came to the participation of internal stakeholders with Site B and C involving heads of subjects. Nonetheless, participation of stakeholders at grass-root level was through consultative meetings held with students and other internal and external stakeholders. However, participation of stakeholders at all levels fell short of the cutting edge technique of strategic planning where information is solicited and there is use of expertise from a wide range of involved stakeholders. These findings differ from what was observed by Lewin (1947) who stated that people may come to a group with very different dispositions, but if they share a common objective, they are likely to act together to achieve it. Limited participation goes against Lewin's concept of action research which involves planning, action and fact finding.

Findings of the study confirmed those of Giesel (1994) and Rice and Schneider (1994) who found that even if the group dynamics are positive, one small group at the top might not know the needs of all stakeholders without their input. It is also difficult for one small internal group to know all that occurs in the external environment that can have an impact, positive or negative, on the college (Giesel, 1994; Rice and Schneider, 1994).

Still on the size of the strategic planning group, Giroto and Mundet (2009) further posit that along these lines, at the organizational macro level, participation can be directed at thinking about strategies and helping to shape a plan that tackles the broader issues. On the other hand, at the micro level there is on-going need for members to participate in organizing and implementing a wide variety of activities that will be all inclusive. For this reason, leaving these activities to a small group of members could make progress slower than it should be and limits diversity and richness of ideas (Andriof and Waddock, 2002; Bush 2011).

Restricted participation in the strategic planning process

It is the researcher's contention that the most interesting finding of this study is that stakeholder participation was restricted. Participation was dependent upon the position held by the individual rather than the expertise or training that the individual had undergone. In this case, the study sought to look at those structures, such as the professional level of actors involved in the strategic planning process, technologies and discourse, through which micro actions are constructed and which, in turn, construct the possibilities for actions. The information gathered on respondents' qualifications revealed that the participants, judging from their qualifications, were in a position to understand the process of strategic planning in a deeper way as the lecturers' qualifications revealed a relevant educational background, which means that they were well informed in strategic planning and were capable of drawing working plans.

Details of external participating stakeholders were also established. This was done to establish personnel linkage between internal and external stakeholders. The advisory council members were those members of the community who were involved in planning college development activities. These members had varied qualifications as reflected in their educational background. Some of the college advisory council members had been involved in college activities for years. External stakeholders have traditionally served as advisors in these sites. This made them appropriate members of the strategic planning process (Glanz, 2006). However, this collaboration does not give a clear picture of the process undertaken within the planning cycles regarding cross-functional staff participation (Giroto and Mundet, 2009).

In light of the foregoing, the profiles of respondents were outlined to show some of the duties they perform in their institutes, as respondents required some form of expertise to function effectively. A fuller understanding of the respondents was meant to reveal why certain practices existed within the administration of colleges of education for the success of strategic planning processes. The data revealed that the positions they held had allowed them automatic involvement in all senior management activities including strategic planning. The hierarchical structure which was used as the channel of command in higher education institutes in the selected sites also served as an indicator of those entrusted with the responsibility to devise plans that are strategic to the development of their institutes.

When planning in an organization, it is vital to make an attempt to ensure wider participation of stakeholders. This is because if they are not involved, they may reject programmes set and

may not be one in purpose with the planners. Poister and Streib (2005) point out that if some sectors of the team are not involved in planning, they may reject the plan and refuse to be involved. At times this happens because they fear changes and feel threatened by them, or simply feel that the management disregards their input. This has dire consequences for the organization because when stakeholders are expected to implement the plan, they are likely to pull in opposite directions and the implementation fails (Poister and Streib, 2005).

It was interesting to note that preliminary meetings that should be held at every department level are not held at all levels but they are held by senior managers. This was another indicator of *restricted participation*. While restricted participation can be seen as not ideal, the researcher contends that it does not fall at rock bottom as indicated by the first rung in Arnstein's (1969) ladder. It falls somewhere between informing and consultation. It is important to note that when fewer people are involved in planning, ideas harvested are limited. Certain insights that could have been useful may not be tabled (Ebdon and Franklin, 2006). Another factor that makes all-inclusive participation of stakeholders desirable is that some distrustful sectors of society are quietened if citizens outside leadership circles are involved (Davies, 2006; Ebdon and Franklin, 2006). When an institution invites the public who are stakeholders to participate in a strategic plan, it must guide them to key focus areas. It must, for example, show targeted goals and outcomes, mechanisms to arrive at these designs already tried and ways of funding them as a starting point (Bush and Bell, 2002; Glanz, 2006; Ebdon and Franklin, 2006).

Participatory problems that accompany strategic planning as a result of restricted participation include the fact that it is difficult to ensure representation of every sector. This research contends that in these cases under study poor representation led to loss of public confidence. Ebdon and Franklin (2006) contend that it is hard to ensure representation. The reasons they advance are that, responses from invited participants may come in too late. As a result, even the articulation of goals may not be well timed. Another factor to note is that at public meetings of stakeholders some people grand stand and say things which are not valid (Ebdon and Franklin, 2006). In such cases, Arnstein (1969) contends that, since it is in both the organization and citizen's interest to seek participation, both parties should make a move to attract stakeholder involvement (Ebdon and Franklin, 2006; Miller and Evers, 2002).

The other interesting part of the finding is that departmental heads in selected sites bring an element of sectional representation. This means that the interest of all sections of the departments that make up the institution might not have a chance to input into the plans. This in a way might not be useful because the workers then get the feeling of not owning the plans neither do they push the plans to fruition because they view the plans as not theirs as evidenced by the studies by Poister and Streib (2005) and Ebdon and Franklin (2006). However, despite sectional representation, the problem identified in Zimbabwe's colleges of education was that not all departments participated and this created a feeling that the exercise of strategic planning was meant for some departments but not others. This confirms the *unequal participation*

that apparently pervades institutions of higher learning. As a result some stakeholders do not take the exercise seriously.

The lower level stakeholders usually in the categories of students should also get a chance to participate in the planning process. This might be necessary since they partner key stakeholders in implementing the plans. While this contention resonates well with Davies' (2006) concept of engaging people, it also links with Lewin's (1947) field theory and Arnstein (1969) public participation theory. The research contends that less engagement of key stakeholders may pose challenges to the plan such as not working hard to fulfil targets. Physical tasks tend to have lower level workers involved in implementation (Poisner and Streib, 2005). It is in this noted argument that all-encompassing strategic planning is beneficial to an institution because the plans require the support of all sectors such as experts politicians, ancillary staff and even students (Fieldman and Khademian, 2007; Vigoda, 2002; Denhardt and Roberts, 2004; Fung and Wright, 2001).

The model of centralizing power in one elevated person who commands the rests of the team which is subordinated is out dated as also observed in related literature by Fieldman and Khademian (2007). Inclusive management thus enables people from various walks of life who come with the purpose of enriching the ideas of the issues being planned (Vigoda, 2002; Fieldman and Khademian, 2007). Restricted participation of internal and external stakeholders is further discussed below.

Participation of Senior and middle management

Another major finding of the current study was that principals as leaders of these institutions did not fully own the strategic planning process. Their participation in the strategic planning process was inversely restricted. Data gathered from the participants revealed that the senior management of the colleges acted as the drivers of the whole process of the strategic planning. They set the time and the tone of the series of meetings. These findings concur with those of Eacott (2011) who postulates that principals had the task of convening the series of preparatory and the actual strategic planning meetings. Findings were further in line with Lewin's (1939) change of management theory, which revealed that the role of the principal was to convene senior management strategic planning preparatory meetings where they would be in a position to choose the chairperson of the main strategic planning session. However, the issue of principals convening the senior management meetings and appointing key personnel to the particular phase of planning confirms inversely restricted participation.

In light of the foregoing, the issue of autonomy and accountability also comes to the fore as findings also revealed the semi-autonomous and mandatory participation by senior management due to ministry requirements. These findings vindicate the position that some stakeholders take the strategic planning process to be a ritual that they engage in periodically at the behest of those in authority. The revelation by PA that he did not sit in preliminary meetings unless he

had time leaves the question of who then is accountable. However, this finding is not in keeping with Caldwell (2002) and Abu-Duhou's (1999) contention that a college can be said to have autonomy if its lecturers and other stakeholders are given high levels of responsibility and authority in planning and implementing those plans. It is the researcher's contention that restricted autonomy also leads to poor or non-accountability. Critical of the intensity of accountability is Hoecht (2006), who commented that the concern for accountability is closely linked to the discovery of the importance of active stakeholder participation for the building of impersonal trust between citizens and their public institutions.

It was also revealed that it was the dean who made sure that all departments were represented in all the planning session and in the actual strategic planning session. However, this was done with limited consultation. In the words of the dean from site B "*it is his duty to ensure that all materials needed for the meetings to run effectively are in place*". These materials include the equipment that is needed to capture the correct record at every stage and the main strategic planning process proceeds well. This revelation confirms a bureaucratic, hierarchical organization model and management approach commonly referred to as *Taylorism* (based on Frederick Winslow Taylor's 1911 classic *The Principles of Scientific Management*). In light of the foregoing, one can contend that the top hierarchy develop plans which they then market to their communities. However, the pre-eminence of the bureaucratic, hierarchical organization model and traditional management practices is facing increased challenge (Lawler, Mohrman and Benson, 2001). In the reviewed literature, participative management has been discussed as a comprehensive governance system that could, and is, replacing the traditional bureaucratic hierarchical system for the new, organic, networked organizational forms emerging in the late 1990s (Lerner, 1999, Dooris, Kelly and Trainer, 2004).

Participation of the College Advisory Council Board Member

Another major finding of the current study was that the participation of college advisory council members was not mandatory but rather through invitation as reported by CACBMA. Their participation, though in the public eye will be representative of wider consultation, was limited to those meetings that they were invited to. External stakeholders have traditionally served in advisory capacities to the educational enterprise. Involvement in strategic planning is much more substantive than the advisory role. Their involvement essentially lays the groundwork for continuing support and participation by those stakeholders (Paris, 2003, Girrotto and Mundet, 2009). Data gathered revealed that the advisory council board members contributed by presenting the views from the community and the parents. However, they did not attend conferences and forums on planning to train in areas of need. Their participation was mainly through the assumption that they are members of the community and they know better what the community wants and was only limited to meetings they were invited to. The other assumption was that the views from former students and graduates of the college would also be revealed through the college advisory council board.

Taking from document analysis, participation was in some instances expressed in ways that could be understood by advisory board members. These included instances where the principal would report and inform members of what is to take place and, thereafter, the meeting was adjourned. The local culture is that the principal knows better. On the other hand, while all sites reported their participation, there was no evidence of their attending preliminary meetings, in the form of minutes from the advisory council. The frequency of the meetings said to be attended by advisory council board was not clear as there was neither evidence of meetings nor evidence of the advice that they gave on the running of the college.

Student participation

The study revealed that students' participation was in-between non-participation and restricted participation in the strategic planning process. This research contends that the pseudo-participation of students in the strategic planning process was designed to mask the centralised nature of strategic planning in some colleges. Their views were not taken seriously, as pointed out by one student. The foregoing indicated that the students' inputs were considered insignificant. The fact that they had never attended any stakeholder meeting, as their views were represented by the dean, confirms the false nature of their participation. This finding does not concur with Lewin's (1939) change model which emphasizes fostering a sense of empowerment, equal partnership and a vested interest in successful outcomes of institutional strategic plans. Pseudo-participation of students in the strategic planning process renders the plans user unfriendly as the community of users is not really conversant with the actual plan.

Improving participation in strategic planning

This study contends that improving participation can directly contribute towards improving the quality and the efficacy of the education system. A study by Giesel (1994) indicates the necessity of having a well-defined, well aligned and well communicated sense of mission if the efforts of stakeholders are to be coordinated towards efficient goal attainment. The concept of resource alignment to strategic plans is related to the idea of consistency. Giroto and Mundet (2009) indicate three levels of alignment, which are, vertical, horizontal and stakeholders. In this case the vertical alignment could be interpreted as the degree of consistency between the different strategic plans from the institution to the business units covering some micro practices (Callahan, 2003). The findings of this study were that there was no consistency in this regard as evidenced by the indications that strategic plans were not reviewed and there were no follow up meetings to check on key performance indicators, and lastly, the indication that very little was achieved.

This research concurs with findings by Giesel, (1994) together with those by Giroto and Mundet (2009) that horizontal alignment could be interpreted as the coordination of efforts across the organization, which requires the exchange and collaboration among various functional activities. The other findings of this study were that very little was done in improving participation

and blame was apportioned to the ever changing political and economic environment as well as education policies that are embedded in a heritage of colonialism, the socialist revolution and most recently, some movement toward a market economy and privatization. Through the use of the *field theory*, college leadership may be able to map out issues impinging on the strategic planning process. Leadership can also bring stakeholders together to work as a cohesive unit but with the understanding of each member's environment (Lewin, 1947). Stakeholder participation alignment in this case is the degree of congruity achieved between the larger institutional plan and the social and economic primary stakeholder's demands (Giroto and Mundet, 2009). The research findings were that, in as much as stakeholders were involved, their involvement ended in the crafting of plans but they were not involved in the alignment of strategies and the consequent performance evaluation.

Summary of main findings

Theories of stakeholder participation have in the 21st century received considerable academic attention particularly in the early 1990s to present day. These theories have been a source of debate at least since the 1960s after a seminal theoretical work on the subject of community participation by Arnstein (1969). Stakeholder participation in strategic planning has also been seen to be important in education and other non-profit making organizations. Strategic planning in colleges of education in Zimbabwe was introduced in the last decade. Giroto and Mundet (2009) argue that although strategic planning has been touted in numerous studies, the empirical use of formal strategic planning and the benefits from its use have been questioned repeatedly. Critics of strategic planning point out its uncertainty regarding its effect on performance (Bryson, 2011; Pisel, 2008), and the critiques have focused in issues such as lacking of realism, or that its formalization would favour analysis over intuition, making planning contradictory to strategy itself (Bryson, 2011; Westhuizen and Legotlo, 1996; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985).

Despite the fact that studies dealing with strategic planning are innumerable, so often the focus has been on the planning process, where the planning sequence appears to be too rigid, too bureaucratic for contemporary organizations in their rapidly changing environments (Pisel, 2008; Hodgson, 2004) which tells more about the rigidity of pre-defined process than about the specificities of planning itself. Indeed, most studies do not actually analyze strategic plans themselves, in other words, empirical studies have not properly addressed the way the strategic plans are written and read, and how this could help to better understand its own performance hence the need to also specifically look at the nature and level of stakeholder participation in the process of strategic planning with the hope of bridging the highlighted gap. With regard to how strategic planning is practiced in the Zimbabwe teacher education colleges, the study concludes that:

Practices such as strategic planning aimed at achieving organizational goals in Zimbabwe's teacher education were mainly carried out through external accountability requirements enforced by the external quality assurance body, the Ministry of Higher Tertiary Education

(MoTHE); The greater reflection is that the practice still appears to be rigid and bureaucratic for organizations that operate in rapidly changing environments like in Zimbabwe. There seem to be no specific criteria for selecting participating members save for seniority and positions held by individuals. Findings were that stakeholder participation in strategic planning at colleges of education was not all inclusive; only a select few individuals do take part in the planning exercise.

Colleges of education and the ministry focus on the product that is, crafting the strategic plan. They ignore the *process* activities such as reviewing plans periodically and taking note of key performance indicators which promote continuous improvement. Managerial actors perform the work of strategy, both through their social interactions with other actors and with resource to the specific practices present. Within this context the study focused on how people engage in doing the real work of strategic planning and found that there is no formal training that they receive and the quality assurance practices by the ministry and internal managers were skewed towards control and compliance; they exhibited managerial accountability tendencies which lie within central bureaucratic approaches.

It was found that central practices of planning which are in some instances employed in colleges of education by the ministry and managers lie in tension with community participation approaches. It again raises questions on sustainability of plans and the autonomy to allocate resources flexibly and on stakeholder focused commitment among all stakeholders. Most participants were purposively selected by managers and they all held middle to senior management positions with the assumption that the requisite qualities, experience and expertise they have will bring in quality to the planning process. The external strategic planning practice in Zimbabwe's teacher training colleges promotes accountability to the ministerial requirements.

National planning still persists in Zimbabwe and it is not clear as to what extent colleges of education are autonomous in their planning. This raises the question on how the global trend toward educational decentralization can be expected to be fine-tuned to meaningful local participation and grass-root planning and management. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the Department of Teacher Education, at the University of Zimbabwe, in consultation with relevant stakeholders should develop norms and standards for teacher education to align Zimbabwe's stakeholder involvement in strategic planning with the global trends.

Recommendations

Colleges should supplement understanding of operational contexts by exploring possible future trends and circumstances. The criteria for reviewing strategic plans should be developed by peers, and practitioners in the field, in consultation with national norms and standards for teacher education.

Self-evaluation needs to focus on the effectiveness of the strategic plans to ensure the achievement of both continuous improvement and accountability. Internal stakeholders and external stakeholders need to be jointly in-serviced on strategic planning practices in higher education to promote collegiality and shared understanding of purpose of activities. The strategic planning process should also involve all stakeholders in timely sensitization and strategic planning training and develop task force teams with a culture of working together on projects. This will ensure that stakeholders fulfil the purpose of institution development.

Conclusion

This study highlighted a variety of approaches to strategic planning that could be adapted to align with the educational colleges' mission and organizational culture and be beneficial. In the increasingly competitive higher education industry, it is crucial for colleges and universities to reaffirm their unique missions and to design operations that will attain institutional goals as effectively as possible.

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