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Influence of Strategic Change Management Practices on Service Quality in Counties in Western Kenya

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Abstract:
Globally, service delivery has remained an issue of utmost concern among public organizations as it anchors key government operations. Statistics indicate that delivery of service in terms of health, sanitation, and infrastructure in county governments of Kenya averages 39% countrywide, with that of the ten-county governments in western Kenya averaging 28%. This is against the Transparency International Kenya requirement of 40%, indicating poor service delivery. However, previous studies on strategic change management practices and service delivery focused majorly on business organizations rather than public institutions, particularly in Kenya's Context. The study, therefore, sought to investigate the influence of strategic change management practices on service quality in county governments in western Kenya. A correlational research design was used, targeting 380 directors and chief officers. The finding revealed that Strategic change management has a significant positive effect (β = .121, p = .000) on service quality, implying that a unit increase in strategic change management leads to a 12.1% increase in service quality. The paper concludes that strategic change management practices are a significant positive predictor of service quality, and it is recommended that management embrace strategic change management practices if they seek to improve their performance.

Keywords: Strategic change management, counties, service quality

1. Introduction

Globally, effective service delivery has been considered an essential aspect of organizational performance, especially in public organizations. According to Khakil and Adelabu (2012), public governance practices seek efficient and effective service delivery. One of the justifications for having public organizations is to serve as an instrument of service delivery (Finn, 2008). Salihu (2011) asserted that public organizations aim to deliver efficient welfare and social and essential services to the public. Therefore, improving service delivery is undoubtedly a cardinal pillar in the act of governance. Therefore, with this pillar, managerial and governance reforms have been revolving around engendering efficient and effective service delivery by public organizations. However, according to Khakil and Adelabu (2012), several variables have been shown to mitigate the delivery of efficient and effective infrastructural, social, and welfare services by public organizations worldwide, including corruption, lack of probity, insufficient funding, stifling government policies, government instability, and structural changes.

In Kenya, the service delivery aspects of public sector performance, including service standards, cost expectations, timelines, and avenues for redress, are set out in citizens 'service delivery charters. The charter was introduced in the public service in 2006 as the key performance sub-indicator under the —service delivery perspective in performance contracts. The charter is an instrument that documents and broadcasts the services rendered by a public institution, the expected service standard, service quality, requirements to qualify for the service, cost, timelines, and avenues for redress. Elsewhere, a Transparency International Kenya report indicates that service quality in the recently established county governments is poor, averaging 39% countrywide, with that of the ten-county governments in western Kenya averaging 28% (Transparency International, 2018). It is documented that there is unsatisfactory health service delivery, poor sanitation facilities, and even poor infrastructure in the region. The report notes that less than 40% of service delivery is poor (Transparency International, 2018). While the report attributes the unimproved economic standings of these county

governments to factors such as corruption, change management practices have been left out. It is interesting, considering that county governments have been in operation for less than ten years and change and transition are common features in such situations. However, despite these theoretical underpinnings advocating for decentralization governance, findings on the impact of decentralization governance on service delivery are mixed and inconclusive, particularly on the moderating effect of change-resistant management on the influence of strategic change management practices on service delivery in county governments in Western Kenya.

Strategic change management is the actions, processes, and decisions that an organization's members execute to realize their strategic intentions (Hardy, 2010). This helps organizations to achieve the highest impact and efficiency and have the least interruption and negative consequences. According to Hardy (2010), managing strategic change is about managing the unfolding non-linear dynamic processes during strategy implementation but rather about change or alignment in policy, systems, styles, values, staff, and skills of an organization to realize a strategy. Organizations, therefore, need to manage their strategies when dealing with competition and challenges around their service delivery.

Empirical evidence indicates inconclusive results on the role of strategic change management on service quality. Empirical studies (Haydn & Mark, 2000; Kim, 2004; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Melchor, 2008; Mugisha & Berg, 2008; Nyambura, 2009; Esu & Inyang, 2009; Munjua, 2012; Mwanza, 2012; Bassam *et al.,* 2013 and; Mwangi, 2015) has demonstrated mixed findings on the effect of strategic change management on firm performance. While using different samples, Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Melchor (2008), and Haydn and Mark (2000) prove that strategic change management may not have any significant effect on service delivery. However, Fernandez and Rainey (2006) use a sample of government organizations in the United States of America which is a politically developed economy. Similarly, Melchor (2008) and Haydn and Mark (2000) use samples from the more developed countries in Europe. Additionally, none of these studies employed service quality as a measure of employee performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Change Management

Johnson and Scholes (2013) define change management as the deliberate and coordinated actions to transform an organization to overcome environmental challenges and achieve its objectives. Hence organizations are undertaking strategic changes to align their business strategies to the environment, thereby matching the resources and activities of an organization to that environment. Hill and Jones (2001) further view change management as a move from a present state to a future state that increases competitive advantage. Elsewhere, Kanter (2014) observes that change management will require:

- Tuning into the environment, challenging assumptions,
- Crafting a vision,
- Using diplomatic skills to get favorable responses (this builds coalitions of backers),
- Keeping actions moving by handling interferences and resistance, maintaining momentum,
- Incorporating emergent developments and never losing sight of the overall goal

In an ever-changing global economy, Johnson and Scholes (2013) note that organizations must find ways to operate by developing new competencies as old advantages and competencies gained are quickly eroded owing to environmental changes.

2.2. The Concept of Quality Service Delivery

A key measure of governance is the quality and availability of essential services such as healthcare, security, and primary education (Hofer & Schendel, 2008). Services comprise a core element of the social contract. Public access to good services indicates that society is well-governed and enables the political leadership to draw continued support for its program (Nauheimer, 2010). In economics, a service is an intangible commodity. More specifically, services are an intangible equivalent of economic goods (Kanter, 2014). Service delivery is often an economic activity where the buyer does not generally, except by exclusive contract, obtain exclusive ownership of the thing purchased. Public services are what society (nation-state, fiscal union, regional) as a whole pays for through taxes and other means (Coe, 2010). Services can be paraphrased in terms of their generic key characteristics, as mentioned by Anders and Michael (2013): thus, the first quality service delivery measure is Intangibility, Perishability, Inseparability, variability, etc. Each of these characteristics is retractable per se, and their inevitable coincidence complicates the consistent service conception and makes service delivery a challenge in every case (Anders & Michael, 2013). Proper service marketing requires creative visualization to effectively evoke a concrete image in the service consumer's mind (Govender et al, 2010).

From the service consumer's point of view, these characteristics make it difficult, or even impossible, to evaluate or compare services before experiencing the service delivery (Young, 2010). This exploratory research was refined with the subsequent scale named SERVQUAL for measuring customers' perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). At this point, the original ten dimensions of service quality collapsed into five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, assurance (communication, competence, credibility, courtesy, and security), and empathy which capture access and understanding of knowing the customers. Later SERVQUAL was revised in 1991 by replacing the 'should' word with 'would' and in 1994 by reducing the total number of items to 21, but the five dimensional structure remained the same.

2.3. Relationship between Strategic Change Management and Service Delivery

Studies have indicated that strategic change management has a positive significant effect on firm performance (Kim, 2004; Mugisha & Berg, 2008; Nyambura, 2009; Esu & Inyang, 2009; Munjua, 2012; Mwanza, 2012; Bassam *et al.,* 2013 and; Mwangi, 2015) seem to imply that performance-oriented organizations should embrace strategic change management, especially in this information age where change is ever present. However, none of these studies focused on service quality in relatively newly-formed governments like Western Kenya. Kim (2004) and Mugisha and Berg (2008) conducted their studies among developed countries using conveniently-selected samples, indicating their results were spurious. Moreover, the studies by Nyambura (2009), Esu and Inyang (2009), Munjua (2012), and Mwangi (2015) used the descriptive research design, implying that the cause-effect was not effectively established. Some studies use samples from private companies, excluding public organizations. Additionally, none of the studies has incorporated communication of change, participation in the change process, and management direction of change as the measures of strategic change management. It, therefore, implies that the studies are biased; hence their findings cannot be generalized to other populations. Consequently, the effect of strategic change management on service delivery in devolved units in Western Kenya has not been established.

Considering the aforementioned literature, the following conceptual framework is proposed in this study, as shown in figure 1.
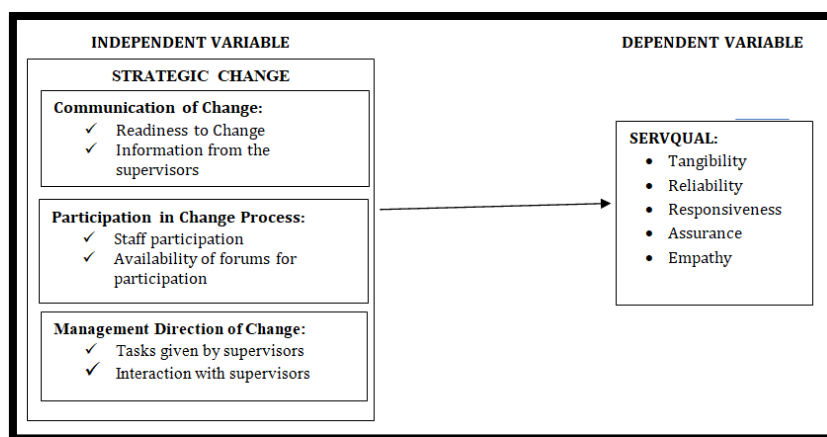

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.4. Specific Objective

The paper was guided by the following specific objective:

- Establish the influence of strategic change management practices on service quality in county governments in western Kenya.

2.5. Hypothesis

- H_{01}: Strategic change management practices have no influence on service quality in county governments in western Kenya.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted the correlational survey research design, structured to examine the relationship between variables and organizational situations (Kothari, 2014). A correlational survey allows for quantitative data and consequent analysis via relationship testing. The survey was conducted in the devolved governments of Kisii, Nyamira, Homa Bay, Migori, Kisumu, Siaya, Vihiga, Kakamega, Busia, and Bungoma County governments. The study targeted heads of departments of all county governments in the western part of Kenya, comprising the directors of departments and the chief officers. According to statistics, there is an average of 26 directors and 12 chief officers in each county. This implies that the target population was 380 from the ten sub-county governments in western Kenya. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The respondents were the primary source of data. The study used quantitative type of data that was obtained from questionnaires. The survey study integrated and used multiple qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to capture the features of both types. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis in the form of percentages, frequencies, and means. Data analyzed descriptively was presented in tables, graphs, and charts because they are visual and give a systematic record of analysis in an easy-to-understand format. The quality of service delivered was measured using the SERVQUAL Scale, gotten from differentiates the perceptions and expectations. Regression analysis was used to test for the association between the independent and dependent variables. The level $P < 0.05$ was considered as the cutoff value or significance.

The model below is a regression model testing the influence of strategic change management practices on service quality in county governments in western Kenya;

$$SQ_1 = \beta_{01} + \beta_{11} COMM + \beta_{21} PART + \beta_{31} DIRE + \varepsilon_1 \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots 3.1$$

Where the variables are defined as:

- β_{01} = The constant term for model 1

- $\beta_{ij}, \beta_{ij}, \beta_{ij}$ =The parameters to be estimated with i representing the coefficient and j the model
- SQ_1- Quality of service delivered for model 1
- *COMM* - Communication of change process
- *PART* - Management Participation in the change process
- *DIRE* – Management Direction of change process
- ε- Error term, with i representing the model

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Characteristics of Respondents

Researchers used descriptive analysis techniques to obtain information regarding the characteristics of respondents. Descriptive analysis is an analytical technique used to explain how the characteristics of the study sample can be described and understood properly. The discussion on the characteristics of respondents in this study will show several aspects, such as gender, the number of years they worked at the institution, education level, and Age of the respondent. The results of the analysis of respondents' gender, as presented in table 1, reveal that gender-wise, the sample consisted of more males (70.2%) than females (29.8%). From the analysis of respondents' level of education, as shown in table 1, most of the employees had a master's degree (70.5%), 10.9% were post-graduate diploma holders, and 6.6% had an undergraduate level of education. Only 2% had a Doctorate. It can be concluded that the employees had the necessary education to proactively participate in strategic change management and service quality issues. Similarly, from the study findings presented in table 1, it is apparent that experience-wise, most employees (55.8%) had an experience of 5 and 10 years. However, a good proportion (31.4%) had experience ranging between two and five years. Finally, results of the descriptive analysis of employees' age distribution presented in table 1 revealed that most employees were aged above 25 years, with 21.7% in the age bracket 25 to 35 years; 30.2% in the 36 to 45 years bracket, and the most, 42.2% in the age bracket of 46 to 55 years.

This implies that the respondents were experienced enough to understand change management aspects and how they affect service quality.

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	181	70.2
	Female	77	29.8
Education Level	Undergraduate	17	6.6
	Post-graduate	54	20.9
	Masters	182	70.5
	PhD	5	2
Work Experience	Less than 2 years	24	9.3
	2-5 Years	81	31.4
	5-10 Years	144	55.8
	Over 10 Years	9	3.5
Age of Respondents	Less than 25 Years	2	0.81
	25-35 years	56	21.7
	36-45 Years	78	30.2
	46-55 Years	109	42.2
	Over 55 Years	13	5

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents
Source: Survey Data (2021)

4.2. Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables

Descriptive statistics and recurrent themes were used to describe the quantitative and qualitative variables under study before exploring their relationships in line with the expectations of the correlational design. Before establishing the intended influence, data were first explored to understand the nature of strategic management practices and service qualities that exist in the county governments in line with what was suggested by Tabachnick & Fidell (2013). Means and Standard deviations were used to explore responses from the questionnaires.

According to table 2, the overall mean response score among respondents concerning the extent of management communication of change was 3.267, with a standard deviation of 1.291. This implies that the extent of management communication of change is a moderately prevalent practice in county governments. Similarly, results in table 2 on the extent of participation in the change process show that the respondents agree that there is participation in the change process (Mean = 3.306). This value lies in the interval, which implies that the extent of participation in the change process is a moderately prevalent practice in the county governments in Kenya. Moreover, the overall standard deviation (SD=1.262) was quite small, indicating consistency in agreement among the respondents. As for the extent of the management direction of change, table 2 shows that the respondents agree that there is a management direction of change (Mean = 3.190). This value lies in the interval, which implies that the extent of Management direction of change is a moderately prevalent practice in the county governments. Finally, the results in table 2 show that the extent of service

quality as measured by the constructs of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy is good, as shown by the respondents (Mean = 3.221, SD = 1.301). This value lies in the interval, which implies the extent of service quality at a moderate/average level in the county governments.

Study Variables/Constructs	N	Mean	Std. dev
Strategic Change Management Practices			
1. Communication of Change	258	3.267	1.291
2. Participation in the Change Process	258	3.306	1.262
3. Management Direction of Change	258	3.19	1.27
Service Quality practices	258	3.221	1.301

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs
(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4 Neither Agree With Nor
Disagree, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, and 7=Strongly Agree)
Source: Survey Data, (2021)

4.3. Hypothesis Test

The study objective was to test the influence of strategic change management practices on service quality in county governments in western Kenya. A regression was run to determine this influence. The detailed results of the multiple regression analysis involving all indicators of the strategic change management practices and service quality are presented in tables 3, 4, and 5 and discussed in the following subsections.

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	43.457	3	14.486	76.259	.000
	Residual	48.248	254	.190		
	Total	91.705	257			
a. Dependent Variable: Service Quality						
b. Predictors: (Constant), MGTDIR, COMM, PART						

Table 3: ANOVA Results of the Relationship between Strategic Change
Measures and Service Quality
Source: Survey Data, (2021)

Table 3 presents ANOVA results of the strategic change management practices-service quality. The data test revealed that $F_{(3, 254)} = 76.259$ at $p = 0.000$, indicating that the model fits the given data well.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. An error in the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.688	.474	.468	.43584	.474	76.259	3	254	.000	1.810
a. Predictors: (Constant), MGTDIR, COMM, PART										
b. Dependent Variable: Mean score of Service Quality										

Table 4: Summary of Strategic Change Management Practices-Service Quality Model
Source: Survey Data, (2021)

The strategic change management practices -service quality model summary in table 4 shows that the proportion of variance in the service quality explained by the independent variables (all three dimensions of strategic change management practices) is *47.4%* or *$R^2=0.474$.* This concurs with the findings of Cohen (1988), 47.4 % of variation explained by the model is regarded as a fairly moderate increase. The other variation in service quality of 52.6% was explained by other external factors outside this model. The difference between *$R^2=0.474$* and adjusted *$R^2=0.468$* is 0.006, showing that the suggested model generalizes quite well as the adjusted *R^2* is too close to *R^2*. According to the interpretation by Field (2005), shrinkage of less than 0.5 depicts that the validity of the model is very good. The value of Durbin-Watson is 1.810, which is close to 2. This indicates a lack of serial correlation.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.849	.159		5.341	.000		
COMM	.271	.055	.290	4.952	.000	.606	1.651
PART	.422	.055	.453	7.723	.000	.601	1.664
MGTDIR	.034	.044	.046	.768	.443	.588	1.702

Table 5: Estimated Regression Coefficients for Variables in Strategic Change
Management Practices -Service Quality Model
Dependent Variable: Service Quality
Source: Main Survey, (2021)

Table 5 shows that out of the three independent variables, two independent variables, communication of change (β = 0.271, p = 0.000) and Participation in the change process (β = 0.422, p = 0.000), had positive significant effect on service quality. The β statistics are interpreted by ranking measures of these independent variables, whereby the higher the magnitude of the β values, the more influence the variables have on the service quality. The unstandardized β coefficient of communication of change shows that a unit's change in the level of communication of change causes a 0.271 change in service quality level, and the change is significant, as shown by the p-value, while a unit change in Participation in the change process causes 0.422 changes in service quality levels among County Government respectively. Other variables, Management direction of change (β = 0.034, p = 0.443), had insignificant positive effects on the service quality levels in County Government. The coefficient of a constant term was at (β = 0.849, p = 0.000) and is significant. The VIF values, which ranged from 1.651 to 1.702, are within the range recommended by Pan and Jackson (2008) and Rogerson (2001). Therefore, the regression results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the strategic change management practices and service quality in county Government, thereby rejecting H_o: β_i =0, the strategic change management practice has no significant influence on service quality in County Government.

By adding a regression coefficient, as was shown in table 5, the study developed analytical model equations for predicting customer satisfaction levels among mobile phones firms:

$\hat{Y}$ = 0.849 +0.271$COMM$ + 0.422$PART$ + 0.034$MGTDIR$ ...Equation 1
  t= (5.341)   (4.952)   (7.723)   (0.768)
R^2=0.474 or 47.4%

4.4. Discussion of Results

These results are in tandem with previous empirical works done by Kim (2004), Mugisha & Berg (2008), Nyambura (2009), Esu and Inyang (2009), Munjua (2012); Mwanza (2012), Bassam *et al.* (2013), and Mwangi (2015) who found that management communication of change has a positive significant effect on firm performance. These results, however, contradict the findings by Kim (2004) and Mugisha and Berg (2008), who conducted their studies among developed countries using conveniently-selected samples and who showed that management communication of change has a negative effect on service quality. The findings also contradict those by Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Melchor (2008), and Haydn and Mark (2000), who found that management communication of change has no significant effect on organizational performance. Therefore, this finding seems to imply that performance-oriented organizations, such as the county governments in western Kenya, should embrace management communication of change, especially in this information age where change is ever present if they seek to improve their service quality.

Regression results concerning the second measure of strategic change management was management participation in change management. Table 4.13 shows that management participation in change affects service quality positively and significantly (β = 0.422, p = 0.000). This implies that a unit increase in management participation in change results in a 42.2% increase in budget adherence when all factors are held constant. These findings agree with those of Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Melchor (2008), and Mugisha and Berg (2008). They showed that if management participates in change management, the employees feel more secure and improve their performance. The findings, however, contradict the findings by Mwangi (2015), Nyambura (2009), and Kim (2004), which showed that management participating in change management does not have a significant effect on organizational performance. Generally, these results seem to imply that management of the county governments in western Kenya should ensure that they participate in the change management if they seek to improve on the services that they offer in the relatively new county governments that are facing changes.

Regression results based on the third measure of strategic change management practices was management direction of change. Results from Table 4.13 show that management direction of change has a positive insignificant effect on service quality (β = 0.034, p = 0.443). These results are at variance with previous empirical works by Mugisha & Berg (2008), Nyambura (2009), Munjua (2012), Mwanza (2012), Bassam *et al.* (2013), and Mwangi (2015). They found that management direction of change has a positive significant effect on service quality. This seems to imply that when management participates in directing change, service quality may not be necessarily likely to improve. The results, however, conform to the findings by Kim (2004) and Mugisha and Berg (2008), who showed that management direction of change has no significant effect on service quality.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the foregoing results, the paper concludes that Strategic change management practices were found to have a significant positive effect on service quality. Therefore, it is concluded that strategic change management practices are a significant positive predictor of service quality in county governments in western Kenya.

Further, the following recommendations can be made in line with the above results. It is recommended that the management of the county governments in western Kenya embrace strategic change management practices if they seek to improve the low service delivery that exists in the county governments.

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