

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE CHALLENGES OF
STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE PUBLIC
ORGANIZATIONS' GOALS ATTAINMENT IN NIGERIA: A
STUDY OF IMO STATE POLYTECHNIC, UMUAGWO**

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the challenges of strategic planning in the public organizations' goals attainment in Nigeria, with a focus on Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo. The paper argues that strategic planning is a veritable tool for the attainment of goals of public organizations in Nigeria, but the realization of these goals is being hindered by lack of competent personnel, inadequate data, over reliance on administrative approach, human factors, ineffective implementation, poor evaluation of outcomes and poor utilization of financial resources. This study utilizes primary sources of data and uses questionnaire instrument for data collection from the respondents. It employs mean score based on four points Likert scale. The paper considers the use of simple percentage statistical method for the analysis of data as well as adopts goals attainment theory of public organization as its framework of analysis. The analysis of data reveals that incompetent personnel, inadequate and inaccurate data, over reliance on administrative approach, ineffective implementation, lack of proper evaluation of outcomes and poor utilization of financial resources are factors that pose challenges to strategic planning in the public organizations' goals attainment in Nigeria particularly in Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo. The paper, therefore, recommends recruitment of competent personnel, access to adequate and accurate data, the use of management technique, effective implementation, adequate evaluation of outcomes and prudence and accountability in the utilization of financial resources.

Keywords: Strategic planning, Public organizations, Goals attainment.

INTRODUCTION

It seems difficult to imagine any organization which desires to survive and succeed as well as accomplish its goals without strategic planning (Sophia & Owuor, 2015). This is because it helps in optimal distribution and prudent utilization of resources, achievement of objectives, innovation and competitiveness, setting priorities and making decisions by rational system as well as initiating actions and alternative actions to respond to possible future challenges (Mohammed, Rahman & Al-Yaaquobi, 2015; Onah, 2015; Ikoro & Nwosu, 2017). Strategic planning is relevant in facilitating appropriate and coordinated management decisions on human resources (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012; Onah, 2015). Importantly, through strategic planning, goals setting and implementation is identified and the decision making process is streamlined (Al-khafaji, 2004 cited in Mohammed, Rahman & Al-Yaaquobi, 2015).

As a vital factor for the attainment of organizational goals, some public organisations in Nigeria still have poor understanding and appreciation of the relevance of strategic planning and how it can be used towards the attainment of goals. This development may be linked to some factors which vary in degrees and complexities from one public organization to another. The key ones among them include incompetent personnel, inadequate data, over reliance on administrative approach, human factors, ineffective implementation, poor evaluation of outcomes and poor utilisation of financial resources.

On the basis of the foregoing, this study focuses on the examination of the challenges of strategic planning in the public organizations' goals attainment in Nigeria, with reference to Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic planning involves the processes that are designed to facilitate timely achievement of organisational goals. It encompasses the identification of the problems of organisation, evolving appropriate measures to be used, careful systematisation and prioritisation of activities and means for the attainment of organisational goals. Despite the fact that strategic planning plays a vital role for the attainment of organisational goals, the efforts that are being made by some public organisations such as Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo appears to have remained without significant results. There is still persistence of poor understanding and appreciation of the relevance of strategic planning and how it could be efficiently used towards the achievement of overall objectives and goals in the organisation. This unfortunate scenario has been linked to incompetent personnel and inadequate data needed for formulation of strategic planning and over dependence on the use of administrative technique which emphasises less on innovation, creativity and goals attainment. Other factors are human factor, ineffective implementation, lack of adequate evaluation of outcomes as well as poor utilization of financial resources .

Objective of the Study

This paper aims at examining the challenges of strategic planning in the public organisations' goals attainment, with reference to Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, in order to proffer measures for effective strategic planning towards goals attainment in the institution.

Research Questions

The research questions include:

- What are the challenges of strategic planning in the public organisations' goals attainment in Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo?
- What measures can be proffered for effectiveness of strategic planning towards goals attainment in I mo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo?

Conceptualisation of Strategic Planning and Public Organisation

Strategic planning derives from two concepts, namely; strategy and planning. Strategy means the process of designing plans on how business or organisation can compete favourably and what policies will be put in place to achieve goals and objectives (Porter, 1980 cited in Aremu, 2010, Owolabi & Makinde, 2012). For Wheelen & Hunger (2012), it involves a comprehensive master plan that states how the organization will achieve its missions and goals. It maximizes competitive advantage and minimizes competitive disadvantage. In other words, strategy is the master plan that shows the choices, preferences, expectations and goals of the organization as well as the process for realising them. On the other hand, planning has been defined differently. For Huchner & Harbold (1966, p. 71), “it is an integrated choice of programmes realistically appropriate to the ends sought and the conditions prevailing”.

Planning involves the setting of objectives and values, analysing problems and taking decisions relating to the organizational structure (Ogunna, 1996). Planning is, therefore, the process of setting out organizational goals and objectives and the processes for achieving them. From the conceptualization of above, strategic planning is viewed as the process of using systematic techniques and rigorous investigation to formulate, implement and control strategy and formally records organizational expectations (Pearce & Robinson, 1994). In this case, strategic planning deals with a conscious, calculative and organised process of formulating and implementing decisions for the attainment of organizational goals. In the same vein, Steiner (2009, cited in Ikoro & Nwosu, 2017) sees strategic planning as the systematic and formalised efforts of an organization to establish the goals, policies and strategies to achieve them. This definition draws attention on goal articulation, formulation and attainment.

Similarly, Adeleke, Ogundele & Oyenuga (2008) write that strategic planning is the process of defining organizational strategy or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, its capital and people. The implication of this definition is that strategic planning focuses on defining organizational direction and taking authoritative decisions on allocation of resources in pursuit of organizational goals. Taiwo & Idunnu (2007) add that strategic planning is a process by which the organization can envision the future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to influence and achieve that future. It consists of underlying processes that are intended to create or manipulate a situation in order to create a more favourable outcome for an organization. It provides overall direction for specific units in the organization.

In a comparative analysis, Udentia (2005) avers that while strategic planning is the process of formulating a direction for an organization, strategic management is the process of determining how this direction can be achieved. Furthermore, Udentia sees the former as an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus, energy and resources, strengthen operations and ensure that employees and other stake holders are working toward

common goals, whereas the latter is a step ahead of strategic planning as it helps in defining it. Strategic planning is implemented and worked upon properly. Essentially, both strategic planning and strategic management may sometimes be used interchangeably, they are, however, not the same, but both are part of the same overall process in the organization.

It follows from the foregoing definitions that strategic planning is a conscious and deliberate action which involves initiating and implementing certain processes and operations for the realization of the organizational goals. It is a comprehensive plan which accommodates goals attainment of an organization. Strategic planning encompasses systematic and sustainable processes and procedures that are concerned with setting appropriate organizational goals and determining the appropriate means to achieve the goals for both immediate and future benefits.

On the other hand, public organization is the machinery through which government performs its functions. It is the institution or agency which pursues desired public goals and objectives (Obikeze & Obi, 2004). It is, therefore, an establishment that is legally created by government which is concerned with coordination of government activities for the accomplishment of public needs and welfare (Sehein, 1988, cited in Abba, Anazodo & Okoye, 2004). However, the goal of having public organization is to render essential services to the people. In this token, Ogunna (2015) argues that the greatest underlying goal of setting up public organization is the pursuit of public interest and welfare.

Theoretical Framework

This study benefits immensely from the goals attainment theory which Georgiou (1973) links to the theories of bureaucracy. Goal attainment theory has deep intellectual roots in classical public administration. Woodrow Wilson's contribution towards the development of goals attainment theory is very remarkable and outstanding. He advocates that government agencies must become more business-like and urges public administrators to hold the efficiency and purposiveness of public organisations' business (Palumbo & Maynard-Moody, 1991).

The general assumptions of goals attainment theory are: (a) Every organisation strives towards the pursuit and attainment of specific goals (b) Employees' actions are determined by the pursuit of organisational goals. However, organizational goal is defined by Ogunna (2007, p. 379) as:

A predetermined value which the organization hopes to realise. It is a specific guide for the actual operations of the organization. It is the objective which is pursued by an organization. It is the result which the organization sets itself to accomplish to which appropriate human and material resources are committed.

Arguably, organizations are goals driven. The goals serve as the standards by which the actions of the organizations are adjudged, and around which decisions and policies are

made. Some of the goals which organizations strive to attain according to Ogunna (2007) are provision of services, stability, survival, effectiveness, efficiency, profits and growth. The goals attainment theory as Palumbo & Maynard-Moody (1991) adduce has certain tenets, which include:

- Organizations exist for attainment of specific goals.
- Referring to goals allows employees to define the overall mission of the organization or its parts.
- Knowing the goals of an organization provides a starting place for understanding organizational processes.
- The goals attainment model of organization provides a conceptually simple definition of organizational efficiency.

The relevance of goals attainment theory to this study is anchored on the premise that through the application of strategic planning in the public organizations such as Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, the employees of the institution can appreciate in no small way the direction of the organization as well as remain focused and consistent to the realisation of its formal goals. It will equally afford the employees an ample opportunity of familiarising with the needs and values of the organization. This is because as Ogunna (2007) forcefully puts it, goals attainment in the public organisations is the means for not only measuring the success and prosperity of the organization but also determine its efficiency and effectiveness. These expressions, therefore, provide justification and rationalization for the utilisation of goals attainment theory in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey method. It made use of a sample size of 125. It utilised non probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling method. It employed both primary and secondary sources of data as well as utilised mean score with the use of four likert scale in the analysis of primary data.

Empirical Review

McNicol, (2005) looks at the challenges of strategic planning in academic libraries in United Kingdom. The paper utilized survey method which emphasized on the use of questionnaire and oral interview. The analysis of data showed that the key issues which needed to be addressed by academic libraries in terms of strategic planning are the involvement of the staff of the library, communication of library aims and plans, level of active participation in institutional and departmental planning evaluation and target setting and involvement in more difficult institutional aims.

Graudou and McLarney (2014) looked at the benefits and challenge of strategic planning in public institutions. The paper posited that improving the lives of the citizens is primarily the justification for setting up public institutions, and in achieving this goal, the operators should not only be transparent but also think and act strategically. The paper was qualitative in

approach as the analysis of data indicated that strategic planning is fundamental for maximizing the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of resources usage and ensuring justification for the pursuit and attainment of objectives and goals in the organization. The paper recommended more focus on research and collection of data on strategic planning initiatives.

Nyagah (2015) examined the challenges of formulation of strategic planning in secondary schools in Kenya with reference to Mombasa County and its environs. The paper argued that strategic planning involves making choices and decisions about the long term future of an organization as well as providing direction and focus for all employees. As an empirical research that relied on secondary information, the analysis of data revealed that leadership, training, resources allocation and education policy frameworks are variables that affect to a large extent formulation of strategic planning in schools. The paper recommended among others the equipment of school leaders with the necessary leadership skills, training of the stakeholders, allocation of adequate funds to schools and development of clear guidelines and mechanism to monitor formulation of strategic planning in schools.

Ikoro and Nwosu (2017) researched on the effects of strategic planning on organizational performance particularly with a focus on Nigerian Bottling Company, Enugu with the aim to know whether strategic planning has effect on the overall performance of the organization. The paper utilized survey design and used a population of 124 which was determined with the use of Yaro Yamane formula. The findings of the study established that a relationship exists between effective strategic planning and organizational performance. The findings equally indicated that lack of accountability, lack of commitment and lack of understanding of the role in the execution process are challenges in the implementation of strategic planning. The paper recommended strong emphasis and commitment to strategic planning and prioritization of employee welfare for organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

Kabeyi (2019) was concerned with organizational strategic planning, implementation and evaluation with emphasis on its challenges and benefits. The author argued that strategic planning which is a process set for the success attainment of an organization in a competitive environment requires self assessment and realization as well as reorganization for a favourable competition. The author further maintained that for strategic planning to be efficient and effective, its formulation and implementation should be linked by an evaluation strategy. The author concluded that more often than not, strategic planning formulation challenges are political rather than administrative.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected from the responses of the respondents in Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo would be presented and analysed. Out of 125 questionnaires distributed, only ninety one (91) were completed and returned within the expected time frame. This study employed simple percentage difference and benefitted from the use of mean score based on four Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A) Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD). They were respectively rated 4, 3, 2, 1 points.

Table 1. Showing the challenging factors of strategic planning (SP) and their mean rating

S/No	Questionnaire	SA	A	D	SD	Total		
						Mean	Score	
1	Poor knowledge of SP	14	22	38	17	91	2.4	Rejected
		(56)	(66)	(76)	(17)	215		
2	Low workers motivation	13	23	38	17	91	2.4	Rejected
		(52)	(69)	(76)	(17)	214		
3	Lack of competent personnel	18	49	10	14	91	2.7	Accepted
		(72)	(147)	(20)	(14)	253		
4	Inadequate data	43	22	18	08	91	3.0	Accepted
		(172)	(66)	(36)	(08)	282		
5	Over reliance on administrative approach	20	52	15	04	91	3.0	Accepted
		(80)	(156)	(30)	(04)	270		
6	Human factors	18	38	22	13	91	2.7	Accepted
		(72)	(114)	(44)	(13)	(243)		
7	Ineffective implementation	48	31	09	03	91	3.4	Accepted
		(192)	(93)	(18)	(03)	306		
8	Lack of adequate evaluation of outcomes	26	46	12	07	91	3	Accepted
		(104)	(138)	(24)	(07)	273		
9	Lack of funds	20	10	41	20	91	2.3	Rejected
		(80)	(30)	(82)	(20)	212		
10	Poor utilization of Resources	50	26	11	04	91	3.34	Accepted
		(200)	(78)	(22)	(04)	304		

Source: Field Data, 2018.

From the table above, top among the major challenging factors of strategic planning in Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo are ineffective implementation and poor utilization of financial resources. While Inadequate data, over reliance on administrative technique and lack of adequate evaluation of outcomes constitute the moderate challenging factors, lack of competent personnel and human factors constitute the least challenges. On the other hand, poor knowledge of strategic planning, low workers motivation and lack of funds are negligible factors. Against the above, it is imperative for us to take a cursory analysis of the above mentioned challenging factors of strategic planning in Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo.

i. Lack of Competent Personnel

An organization without competent and efficient personnel cannot produce sustainable strategic planning that has the capacity of realizing its goals. Lack of professionally competent and experienced personnel impacts negatively in the strategic planning approach of the organization. It is evident in many public organizations that the needed skilled and qualified manpower is in short supply. This is probably because of the way and manner in which employees are recruited into public service in Nigeria which negates merit principle. The merit principle is meant to promote outstanding civil service by appointing the best talented personnel through competitive examination and manage them with humane, just and fair treatment. Sadly, the recruitment process in most public organizations is often characterized by political considerations where favoritism, god-fatherism, bribery and corruption, among others play out (Ogunna, 2007). Hence, the quality of the personnel determines the efficacy of strategic planning of organizations. In this light, there is need to encourage merit system to ensure the appointment of the best talented personnel through competitive examination which would help to formulate sound strategic planning in the organization towards goals attainment.

ii. Inadequate Data

Paucity of data is the bane of strategic planning in the public organizations. The importance of data was offered by Ogunna (1996) as he avers that a good grasp of the totality of information within the organizational environment is an indispensable requirement for successful strategic planning in the public organization, and can be achieved through adequate and accurate information about the organization. Again, inadequate reliable and accurate data according to Eme (2010) demand information on the organization itself, on trends and changes, on personnel, on external relations and programmes. This is because lack of records keeping and documentation undermines strategic planning. It is, therefore important for organizations to maintain a statistical records unit which should ensure that accurate records of operations of the organizations and other relevant data are maintained. This will make for ease of efficient strategic planning and goals attainment in the organizations.

iii. Over Reliance on Administrative Approach

Public organizations emphasize more on administrative approach which connects to strict compliance to bureaucratic rules and appropriate procedures. This results to red-tapism, administrative rigidity and timidity, conservatism and insensitivity to popular demands and lack of innovation (Palumbo & Maynard-Moody, 1991; Sapru, 2002; Ogunna, 2007; Sharma, Sadana & Kaur, 2012). All these factors above constitute bottlenecks to effective strategic planning and goals attainment in the public organizations. There is an overriding need to adopt management approach which lays more emphasis on attainment of organizational goals, creativity and innovation rather than strict and rigid compliance with rules and procedures (Verweire, 2018). In other words, management approach is the key to dynamic and result oriented strategic planning. This is probably why it constitutes part of the

recommendations of Udoji Public Service Review Commission (1974) which sought to transform the Nigerian federal civic service by the introduction of the result oriented management style. Unfortunately, this recommendation was not implemented (Adibe, 1999).

iv. Human Factor

The personnel who are involved in strategic planning in the public organization are not gods but human beings. As mere mortals, they are often influenced by their own values, attitudes, behaviors, idiosyncrasies and norms. This situation results in the personnel responding to one's own personal values and attitudes rather than being objective and realistic. When the available data and information in the organization clearly show the best approach and course of action to take, the personnel may disregard and jettison this, and make choice based on personal values and bias (Ogunna, 1996). This human factor calls for discipline on the part of the employees involved in initiating strategic planning towards the attainment of organizational goals. This, however, can be checkmated by putting in place inbuilt system of strategic planning reviews before its implementation.

v. Ineffective Implementation

The implementation of strategic planning in the public organisations is usually inconsistent and ineffective. In this case, there is the tendency that strategic planning will not yield the expected results. As acknowledged by Ogunna (2007), strategic planning is a mere proposal and an ordinary paper work if it is not put into practical realities. The implementation of strategic planning must be pursued with high consistency and commitment. Without it, it will be difficult to meet organisational goals. Against the foregoing, efficient implementation is a precondition for the success of strategic planning in the public organizations like Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo.

vi. Lack of Adequate Evaluation

Evaluation of strategic planning is the comparison between intended outcome of strategic planning and actual results gained after implementation. The problem that is often observed is that most of the superiors in the organisation are involved in initiating strategic planning lack the capacity to evaluate results and outcomes. This makes it difficult to adjust strategic planning to changing circumstances (Kabeyi, 2019). David (2011) posits that to ensure proper and adequate evaluation of strategic planning in the public organizations, there should be an examination of the underlying bases of organizational strategic planning, comparing expected results with actual results and taking necessary corrective measures and actions to ensure that performance conforms to plans.

vii. Poor Utilization of Financial Resources

Poor utilization of financial resources is one of the key factors that undermine successful strategic planning towards the attainment of organizational goals. This sometimes manifests

in misappropriation, mismanagement and misapplication of financial resources (Ikoro & Nwosu, 2017) as well as poor accountability in the use of funds meant for the implementation of strategic planning for organizational goals attainment (Giraudou & Mclarney, 2014). Where resources are not prudently and judiciously used, the implementation of strategic will suffer setbacks.

Concluding Remarks

Strategic planning is an essential factor for the realization of organizational goals. Strategic planning will not make significant impact on the attainment of organizational goals where there are incompetent personnel, inadequate data, over reliance on administrative approach, use of human factor, ineffective implementation, lack of proper evaluation and poor utilisation of financial resources. However, for goals to be attained in the public organizations through strategic planning, seven conditions should be satisfied. The first is competent personnel. This involves recruiting qualified, experienced and trained personnel. The second condition is ensuring that data needed for strategic planning are accurate and adequate. The third is the application of managerial approach rather than administrative technique in the operations of the organizations. This is because management approach has more emphasis on result and goal attainment, creativity and innovation. The fourth is overcoming human factor. This shows that those who are in the position of initiating strategic planning in the organization should be objective and realistic. The fifth condition for effective strategic planning that will lead to goals attainment is ineffective implementation. This suggests that the implementation of strategic planning requires consistency and commitment from the management of public organisations in Nigeria. The sixth condition is adequate evaluation. This means that there should be adequate periodic assessment of strategic planning, comparing the expected results with actual results and taking the necessary corrective measures and actions to ensure that performance conforms to plans and goals. Lastly, there is an overriding need for accountability and prudent management and utilisation of financial resources.

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