



Article title: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN ORGANIZATIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN ORGANIZATIONS: A
CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

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ABSTRACT

Strategic leaders need to be certain about what they want to achieve for the organization. Efficient and effective leaders develop strategies and structures that are clear and work with employees that adhere to good ethical practices that enable the organizations to achieve set goals. Strategic leadership is important to all organizations, whether in public and private sector, albeit in different contexts. This paper sought to critically review literature on the link between strategic leadership and service delivery in organizations. Several theories were reviewed, namely upper echelons perspective, strategic leadership theory, principal agency theory and new public management theory. A conceptual framework was developed to provide the basis of the identified theories with a view to explaining and predicting the variables through definition of the contents and attributes of those theories. Strategic leadership was conceptualized as the independent variable while service delivery in organizations was hypothesized as the dependent variable. Conceptual and empirical studies were undertaken to examine the existing literature in strategic leadership as well as service delivery. Arising from the review, several knowledge gaps were identified. The study established that strategic leadership is applicable to all organizations with an increasing number of organizations continually embracing it upon realizing that it is a key success factor in organizational performance and therefore in the delivery of service for the benefit of the public.

Key words: strategic leadership, service delivery, public sector, citizens.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic leadership is increasingly taking center-stage in the running of organizations, driven by the need to learn, transform and impart management skills to improve performance (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Organizations are complex and composed of interrelated systems. As such leadership ought to be focused and based on clear vision, action and careful decisions (Quong & Walker, 2010). Besides envisioning and envisaging the direction of the organization over the long-term, strategic leadership is a flexible approach that empowers members of the organization to embrace strategic change as it occurs (Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2007). Ireland (2007) contends that strategic leadership could turn out to be one of the most important issues that organizations face. The achievement of improved performance by organizations will be greatly enhanced where strategic leadership is functional. Schette, Barkhuizen and Swanepoel (2014) maintain that strategic leadership empowers organizations to expect, plan and show flexibility. Joyce (2012) contends that strategic leadership unambiguously defines the purpose of the organization by providing a clear pathway towards strategy formulation and succeeds on conditions of flexibility making it amenable to changes in the environment. This quality makes strategic leadership multi-functional as it aligns the internal competencies of the organization to the external environment (Simsek, Jansen, Minichilli & Escriba-Esteve, 2015). Strategic leadership is therefore a key success factor in organizations and can contribute to enhanced service delivery.

The Concept of Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership lends itself to the argument that good leaders work with strategies, clear structures and good ethical practices to enhance delivery of service, particularly in the public sector (Allio, 2015). Early scholars referred to strategic leadership as determination of where an organization was going and how it would get there (Cheng, 2000). It was considered a concern of leaders, mainly the senior management, who engaged in strategic and long range planning. The management functions of planning, organizing, directing, staffing and controlling were also regarded as strategic. Over time, strategic leadership has advanced beyond vision statements and plans (Quong & Walker, 2010). Rowe (2001) describes strategic leadership as the capacity of leaders to sway others to make decisions that will contribute to improving the organizations in the long term while ensuring that the organizations remain stable in the short term. A key plank of this definition is the deliberate effort by the leader to chart a long-term direction for the organization. For example, in the wake of the invasion of Covid-19 pandemic, policy makers and researchers alike are wondering whether there is need to reexamine leadership in totality and evolve new models, approaches and practices that would reassure the populace in times of uncertainties and instability. Farhan and Wright (2021) argue that to improve leadership effectiveness in times such as these, it is important to adopt approaches that can make a difference in people's lives and wellbeing. Hence the need for strategic leadership. Thus, a strategic leader is expected to be a source of inspiration, hope, resilience and unrelenting to drive the implementation of the organization's strategy, thinking strategically how activities being executed will impact the future while reassuring and rallying team members to individually contribute to achievement of organizational objectives. From this review, it is evident that strategic leadership is critical in the establishment and growth and development of an organization's philosophy. An increasing number of writers are agreed that organizations with strategic focus are those that not only embrace strategic methods including strategic planning, but also practice strategic leadership (Davies, 2008).

Service Delivery

This concept is applicable in provision of social goods such as roads, classrooms and other social benefits rather than the provision of outcomes like poverty alleviation, road safety and improvement of literacy levels. In this study, service delivery is defined as continuous cyclical activity that develops and delivers customer-focused services. The public sector exists to deliver services to the people. Riekert (2001) argues that leaders in the public sector are obligated to provide services to the public. The delivery of service by the government is not simply aimed at enjoyment by the citizens, rather it is also about protecting the rights of citizens. It is therefore critical that the delivery of service to the public is evaluated against set performance targets which impact the lives of the citizens (Gaitho & Awino, 2018).

Strategic Leadership and Service Delivery

Strategic leadership is about making decisions on services needed by the public in the public sector (Ireland & Hitt, 2005). Strategic leaders focus on current stability of their organizations as well as future viability and therefore their decisions aim at promoting efficiency, better performance and improved delivery of service Naidoo (2011). Several writers on strategic leadership and service delivery cite poor management as a key contributor to poor service delivery. Joyce (2012), for example, argues that most organizations fail to provide services that meet the needs of the customers as they fall short of meeting the quality standards and they are not available in the right quantities and at the right prices. Wart (2003) maintains that effective leadership has inbuilt mechanisms that engender the delivery of superior goods and services more efficiently by ensuring that the vision of the organization is aligned to the environment thus allowing creativity and innovations to prosper. Jiwani (2016) argues that a well-functioning public sector is one that provides citizens with high quality services that are consistent with their needs. To deliver services efficiently and effectively therefore, strategic leaders should consider investing in human resource development to equip their staff with the requisite competencies to enhance skills, motivate the employees and ultimately make them more productive.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Several theories inform this paper. These are; Upper Echelons Perspective, Strategic Leadership theory and Principal Agency theory. A review of these theories reveal a common thread - task, people and development - that runs across when viewed against the background of effective leadership and service delivery (Sanders & Davey, 2011).

Upper Echelons Perspective postulates that the performance of organizations is predicated on the qualifications and experience of Top Management Team (TMT). The effectiveness of leaders as well as the strategies they deploy reflect their values and knowledge and leadership styles and qualities impact service delivery to the public (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). This perspective lays the foundation for the role of strategic leaders in influencing organizational outcomes, and maintains that outcomes and strategic choices depend on top managers (Carpenter, Geletkanycz & Sanders, 2004). Owing to the arguments put forth by exponents of the theory, the link between strategic leadership and service delivery continues to receive substantial attention from researchers with strategic leadership emerging as central in the realization of quality public service delivery (Gaitho, Ogotu, Awino & Kitiabi, 2018). Equally, Narayanan and Zane (2018) argue that the impact of strategic leadership on the delivery of service extends to the external environment of the

organization. However, the theory has been faulted for failing to study actual strategic leadership behavior. For example, Priem, Lyon and Dess (1999) disapprove of the use of demographic indicators as substitute for strategic leadership behaviours arguing that much of the research that linked strategic leadership behaviours to performance has created problems especially when construct validity is swapped with measurement validity.

Strategic Leadership theory developed from Hambrick and Mason's (1984) Upper Echelons theory. The goal of this theory was to investigate how top management hierarchy influence strategic decision-making (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). Boal and Hooijberg (2000) progressed Hambrick's (1989) proposition by arguing that strategic management is applicable in ambiguous, complex and turbulent environments with information glut. Strategic leadership therefore aims to develop and sustain learning to spawn change to equip managers with the ability to make the right decisions (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). Several models have emerged from strategic leadership theory. Key among these is Ireland and Hitt Strategic Leadership Model which positions employees at the center of the organization and argues a case of recognizing employees as an important resource and core competence.

Principal Agency theory presupposes that there is a conflict in terms of objectives to be achieved by the principal and agent (Eisenhardt, 1989). The principal is less risk-averse than the agent. In the public sector-setting, the principal is the citizen while the agent is the leadership whose responsibility is to manage resources to ensure that services are delivered to the citizens (Van Essen, 2011). Gaitho and Awino (2018) contend that this theory is applicable to leadership and service delivery as it describes the relationship between the players in public service delivery matrix.

The economic downturns that have been experienced by many economies have been caused by the inefficiencies in the public sector (Scott, 1982). The predominant line of thought is that private sector models are effective and are capable of providing solutions to the problems bedeviling governments. Early public service theories that were developed, including Scientific Management theory, proposed that governments should operate like business entities (Hartle, 1985; Waldo, 1948). Proponents of these theories were of the view that the introduction of business-related approaches in public sector administration would enhance service delivery. This gave rise to New Public Management (NPM) theory. The theory, mooted around 1980s, is predicated on the assumption that when governments operate as businesses, greater efficiency is realized and therefore improved service delivery to citizens (Costantinos, 2014). In recent times, Public Value theory has also emerged with proponents maintaining that governments need to focus on citizens, by paying attention to governance issues by incorporating public agencies to work with citizens to co-generate public value.

The trend of public service management and specifically governance, is increasingly becoming digital with the focus being integration of developmental issues into government control, an all-encompassing government and use of web-based vehicles to capture data, store and communicate within government (Dunleavy & Margetts, 2006). Hence the emergence of successor to NPM, Digital Era Governance whose centerpiece is integration of government functions with information and technology capabilities. Another recent model is New Public Governance, whose focus is

concentration of decision-making, biasedness in staffing, politicization of public appointments and partisanship in the running of the government of the day (Aucoin, 2008).

CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The conceptual framework of this paper provides the basis of the anchor theories and therefore explains and predicts the variables by defining the contents and attributes of the underlying theories. Several studies relevant to the topic of strategic leadership were reviewed and knowledge gaps identified. Almost all the papers were clear on the relationship between strategic leadership and public service delivery. This study conceptualizes strategic leadership as the independent variable while public service delivery is the dependent variable.

Gaitho et al. (2018), for example, sought to relate strategic leadership to service delivery of county governments in Kenya. The study used descriptive research and targeted all the 47 counties in Kenya, focusing on six departments that cover key sectors in the county economies. The services were in agriculture, education, health, public works, planning and natural resources. The study determined the extent of strategic leadership along five variables which were operationalized namely; influence, engagement, vision, motivation and reward. The findings revealed that the engagement between county leaders and their staff is high and is spawning growth and development in the counties and therefore giving the citizens hope and confidence in the economies and leadership. Gaitho and Awino (2018) in their study of Strategic Leadership and Service Delivery in African Context, examined the joint effect of strategic leadership and organization structure on service delivery, by focusing on 47 counties in Kenya as per the 2010 constitution. Just like Gaitho, et al. (2018), this study concentrated on six departments responsible for key sectors in the economies of the counties. Using multiple regression analysis, the study findings concluded that strategic leadership, organizational structure and ethical practices, when combined, have a significant influence on service delivery. In the study, Creating Public Service Excellence Applying Learning Organization Methods, which emphasized on the role of strategic leadership, Shutte and Barkhuizen (2014) sought to explore the extent to which a learning organization approach can impact public service efficiency and effectiveness. Strategic leaders from five major central government institutions were interviewed and grounded theory was used to analyze data. The findings brought out the need for public-sector leadership to continually scan the external environment to learn new and emerging trends in their areas of operation. Onder (2010) in investigating strategic management practice in the public sector in USA, and specifically examining the adoption of reinventing strategies, analyzed different strategies adopted by various states to reinvent government reforms. The study used descriptive research design to determine the differences in reform strategies across the 50 states that make up United States of America and found that the relationship between legislative party competitiveness and success of reinventing reform strategies is inverse.

Table 1: Summary of research gaps

Researchers		Focus	Methodology	Findings	Knowledge gaps
Gaitho Ringii	Peter and	Influence of ethical practices and	Cross sectional survey, primary and secondary	Strategic leadership can play a great role	The study conceptualized strategic leader's

Awino Zachary Bolo (2018)	organizational structure on the relationship between strategic leadership and the delivery of service by county governments in Kenya.	data collected and analysis done at both descriptive and inferential statistics levels. Multiple regression used.	in facilitating service delivery.	influence in service delivery in the context of county governments in Kenya; does this mirror the situation at the National government as a composite of county governments?
Gaitho Peter Ringii, Ogotu Martin, Awino Zachary Bolo, and Kitiabi, Reginah (2018)	Relationship between strategic leadership and service delivery of county governments in Kenya.	Cross sectional survey, descriptive research design.	Strategic leadership of county governments greatly impacts their service delivery.	Conceptualization of variables as static over a five year period was based on the assumption that the measures had not changed during this period. This doesn't give the true picture. Also, the variables under study were mostly quantitative, meaning the study did not give room to qualitative aspects thus failing to provide conclusive results of effects of variables studied.
Shutte Nico, Barkhuizen Nicolene, and Swanepoel Sonia (2014)	Developing a strategic leadership competency measure for strategic leaders in South Africa's public sector.	Cross sectional survey, exploratory factor analysis and descriptive statistics performed.	Current leadership competencies of public sector leaders in South Africa needs improvement.	This was cross sectional survey. A longitudinal survey should be used to determine strategic leadership competencies over the long term.
Onder Murat (2010)	Strategic management practice in reinventing	Descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis and	Different states have reinvented government reforms	The study did not conclusively address the question about factors that

	government reforms in public sector in states in USA.	multiple regression.	differently i.e. it varies from state to state.	contribute to adoption of strategic reforms across the states in the United States.
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Source: Author (2019)

CONCLUSION

Organizations are established to achieve specific set of goals. This responsibility fall on the strategic leader, who equipped with the capability to rally members of the organizations, should be able to inspire them and steer the organization to attain the predetermined goals. This means that strategic leadership bequeaths leaders the capacity to originate and reconstruct the purpose of the organization and what it exists to do. As Kirimi and Minja (2010) expound, strategic leaders guide the process of formulating vision, mission and strategies and well as implementing the strategies. There is a logical connection between effectiveness of leadership in the public sector and strategic leadership. Effective leaders ought to be familiar with the situation the organization is facing as well as the people they are leading. They also need to be confident, possess the skills to build alliances, coalitions and trust among the followers. In the public sector, strategic leadership is concerned with the changing trends of the performance of the organizations which is directly tied to internal organizational competencies and the changes in the external environment of the public sector organizations. Public service aims at meeting the needs of the citizens. The delivery of service is the process of production and dispatch of goods and services to the intended recipients, in this case the public (Universal Dictionary, 1961). Strategic leaders therefore play major roles in ensuring that resources are mobilized to deliver goods and services to a discerning public.

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