

Influence of Management Commitment on Strategy Implementation and Organizational Performance of Public Universities in Kenya

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Accepted: 21 March 2026 || Published: 11 April 2026

Abstract

This study examined the influence of management commitment on strategy implementation and its effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya. Grounded in Resource-Based Theory, the study adopted a descriptive research design and a census approach targeting all 35 chartered public universities. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires. The findings revealed that although all public universities had developed strategic plans, a majority (66.7%) did not implement them within the anticipated timeframe. Management commitment emerged as a critical determinant of effective strategy implementation and institutional performance. The results indicated a strong and significant relationship between management commitment and performance ($\beta = 0.462$, $p < 0.05$), highlighting the importance of leadership support, clear communication, and goal alignment in driving successful implementation. While organizational structure and resource allocation also showed significant positive effects, management commitment demonstrated the strongest influence. The study concludes that strengthening management commitment is essential for improving the implementation of strategy and enhancing the performance of public universities in Kenya. It recommends fostering strong leadership support, enhancing communication of strategic objectives, and aligning institutional resources with strategic priorities to achieve optimal performance outcomes.

Keywords: *Management commitment, strategy implementation, organizational performance, public universities, Kenya, strategic management*

How to Cite: Kahendi, I. L., Kilifi, J., Mwakubo, S., & Mung'asia, C. M. (2026). Influence of Management Commitment on Strategy Implementation and Organizational Performance of Public Universities in Kenya. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 6(1), 9-21.

1. Introduction

Strategic management has become increasingly critical for enhancing organizational performance by effectively formulating and implementing strategies aligned with institutional goals and vision. In the higher education sector, particularly in Kenya, public universities have embraced strategic planning to navigate a dynamic, competitive environment while supporting national development agendas, such as Vision 2030. The adoption of strategic plans, beginning with institutions such as the University of Nairobi, reflects the sector's recognition of structured planning as a driver of improved decision-making, responsiveness, and overall performance (Bryson, 2018; Kivati, 2017).

Despite the growing emphasis on strategic planning, implementing strategies remains a major challenge globally and regionally. Studies indicate that a significant proportion of organizational strategies fail to achieve intended outcomes due to factors such as poor coordination, inadequate resources, weak leadership, and lack of management commitment (Dahiye & Gekara, 2019; Brinkschröder, 2014). In higher education, institutions face additional pressures, including limited funding, rising student enrollment, technological changes, and evolving regulatory requirements, all of which complicate effective strategy execution (Mwanthi, 2018; Sanad, 2018).

In Kenya, the performance of public universities has been closely linked to the effectiveness of strategy implementation, with management commitment emerging as a key determinant. Empirical evidence highlights that support from top management, alongside factors such as organizational structure, communication, and resource allocation, significantly influences successful implementation and institutional performance (Josephine, 2021; Kianda & Kitur, 2021). Given the critical role of public universities in driving socio-economic development, understanding how management commitment shapes the implementation of strategy and performance remains essential for enhancing institutional effectiveness and sustainability.

1.1 Problem Statement

Strategy implementation in institutions of higher education and learning can be difficult because they are typically very large and complex. Waithira (2018) argues that a major source of worry for strategists is the widespread failure to successfully apply strategies in the real world of business.

In Kenya, public universities have begun to take strategic planning more seriously because they recognize the challenges they face today and are required by the government to carry out strategic planning (GOK, 2006). According to Nyakeriga (2015), as a formality, all public universities have strategic plans on paper; most have not implemented them, as evidenced by poor performance in structural development, internal organization, competent personnel, administrative systems and policies, and human resources practices. This poor performance of University activities by University management has led to stagnation of planned development projects.

Kilile et al. (2018) found that public institutions have strategic plans, but their implementation is inadequate, in their study of the influence of strategic implementation on the performance of state organizations in Kenya. Chepkosgei and Atambo (2018) conducted a study to examine the influence of resource allocation on the implementation of strategic plans in public universities. According to Nyakeriga (2015), it is standard procedure for Kenya's public universities to have written strategic plans. The research found that the university's management had been unable to improve the performance of university activities, which had stalled previously planned development programs.

It is worth noting that previous studies focused on case study research on specific factors for instance Chepkosgei and Atambo (2018) who focused on resource allocation aspect, Kilile et al. (2018) focused on strategic plan implementation on organization performance of public sector organizations in Kenya, Nyakeriga (2015) focused on newly established universities in Mt. Kenya region and Mukhokho (2010) did a research on the influence of strategic planning on Performance of public universities in Kenya by focusing on university of Nairobi.

Given the limited research and papers on the implementation of strategic planning among universities in Kenya, as reviewed, this research aims to investigate further the influence of

management commitment on strategy implementation and its effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To find out the influence of management commitment on strategy implementation and its effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

H₀₁: Management commitment has no influence on strategy implementation and its effect on the performance of public universities in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This theory was advanced by Wernerfelt in 1984. According to the RBV, organizations can excel beyond their rivals only if they create unique, valuable resources that their competitors lack (Cooke et al., 2005). This idea is helpful for understanding how businesses can develop their own distinctive assets and how those assets can be integrated into the administration of a revamped organizational structure (Marvel, 2013). Because they are the engine that keeps a business running, Ganley (2010) says it's important to allocate organizational resources wisely.

Although resource allocation can be complex, with some skill and forethought, every business can amass the resources it needs to succeed. The resources of a firm include its money, people, technology, and expertise. If a firm is viewed as a collection of resources and competencies that can be combined to give the company a competitive edge, then its competitors will be unable to replicate the company on the same scale.

In a nutshell, a firm's unique internal resources determine the tactics it employs to compete with rival businesses. According to Omondi et al. (2013), resources can be both tangible and intangible assets that an organization uses in its operation. Proper allocation of a company's resources is important to the success of implementing strategic plans. According to the Resource-Based View (RBV), a firm has a sustainable competitive advantage when its resources are not only valuable but also distinctive to that firm and difficult for competitors to copy.

An organization's ability to implement initiatives that boost its efficiency and effectiveness depends on the availability of valuable resources. Because they are scarce, competitors should not have exclusive access to them. Resources must be non-substitutable, cannot be replaced by some other non-rare resource, and must be imperfectly imitable; they must be difficult for others to replicate (Wijethilake & Ekanayake, 2018). Since the distribution of a university's human, physical, technological, and financial resources affect the success of a given plan, RBV was used in this study of public universities in Kenya. Furthermore, public universities in Kenya gain a competitive edge through effective training and development of their human resources, leading to better implementation of strategic plans and, ultimately, higher performance. Furthermore, all of these assets are crucial to the success of Kenya's public universities in service provision, timely project completion, and overall institutional growth.

2.2 Empirical Review

Jitpaiboon and Kalaian (2005) used a hierarchical structure to examine the influence of top management support on IS performance in a variety of businesses in the United States. The study primarily used a descriptive survey format. Three thousand high-level IS executives made up the target population. The findings showed that top-level management endorsement

had a slight-to-moderate impact on IS output. According to the findings, there was a lack of close collaboration between the organization's supporting personnel and senior management. Findings demonstrated that IS implementation teams typically make crucial IS project decisions requiring significant financial resources. Implementers who understand the significance of IS initiatives to business operations will devote both time and energy to seeing that they succeed. Top-level support is crucial to a project's prospects of success.

Al Shaar et al. (2015) investigated the influence of top management support on Business innovation in Jordan. The research focused on 210 firms. The study found that process and product innovation are influenced by the interplay between a company's structure and its use of information technology. Management of higher institutions of learning may foster a flexible environment to allow creativity and innovation.

Ileri and Deya's (2019) study revealed that for high performance to be achieved, management must motivate and encourage employees, and allow them to express their views and understandings on how best to implement the strategy.

Furthermore, the dependent variable, innovation support, was distinct from performance. The impact of transformational governance on business performance was studied by Iqbal et al. (2015) in Pakistan, with top management support serving as a moderating variable. According to the study's results, the influence of governance on company performance is moderate. However, the lack of backing from the upper echelons of management significantly hampered the company's output. The favorable and significant effect of top management support on project success was evident even when only that factor was considered.

Researchers Al Shobaki et al. (2016) investigated top management support for strategic planning on crisis management in Egypt. Descriptive survey methodology was employed for this study. It was discovered that top-level management recognizes the importance of HR strategic planning but doesn't provide financial support.

Karungani and Ochiri (2017) investigated leadership and management support and firm performance in Kenya. According to the findings, company performance is influenced by senior management support. According to the findings, management is responsible for setting the company's direction and ensuring that all employees work toward the company's vision and goals. Management is also accountable for providing direction and guidance to employees and the company as a whole.

Managers should have a strong culture that fosters a clear understanding of information across all sections of the firm, given the crucial role communication plays. Güney et al. (2012) conducted a research study on communication and employee commitment in organizations in Turkey. The study's findings indicated that open communication plays a role in shaping employee commitment. According to the results, open and honest dialogue between managers and workers increases organizational performance. In addition, employees are more dedicated to their work when their input is heard and considered.

Meitisari et al. (2018) studied communication and firm performance in Indonesia. Employee performance was unaffected by communication but strongly influenced by career training. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that happier workers were more productive. According to the results, transparent communication from superiors to subordinates and group decision making have a negative impact on worker productivity.

A study by Mwanthi (2018) found that communication, organizational leadership, employee participation, and resource allocation positively influenced the implementation of strategies in

Kenyan universities. Resource allocation, employee participation, strategy communication, and organizational leadership were all found to positively influence the hypothesized variables of strategy implementation success. Communication was shown to be an important factor that positively influences strategy implementation.

Kiugu (2021) did a research study on communication and strategy implementation in the financial sector in Nakuru County, Kenya. Poor communication was identified as a factor contributing to low employee motivation. The study also revealed that financial institutions' inability to communicate effectively has created vacuums and misunderstandings within their operations and procedures. Financial organizations fail to effectively convey their long-term goals and objectives to their employees. According to the findings, senior management does not provide any type of feedback following the completion of the evaluation process. In addition, the financial sector's general underperformance has been associated with poor communication. Nonetheless, the implementation of the strategic plan was the dependent variable in this research, whereas public university performance was not. The financial industry, on the other hand, is profit-driven, while public universities are non-profit institutions.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are basic structures representing the systematic characteristics of a system being considered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The framework, therefore, shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The conceptual framework used in the study is presented in Figure 1.

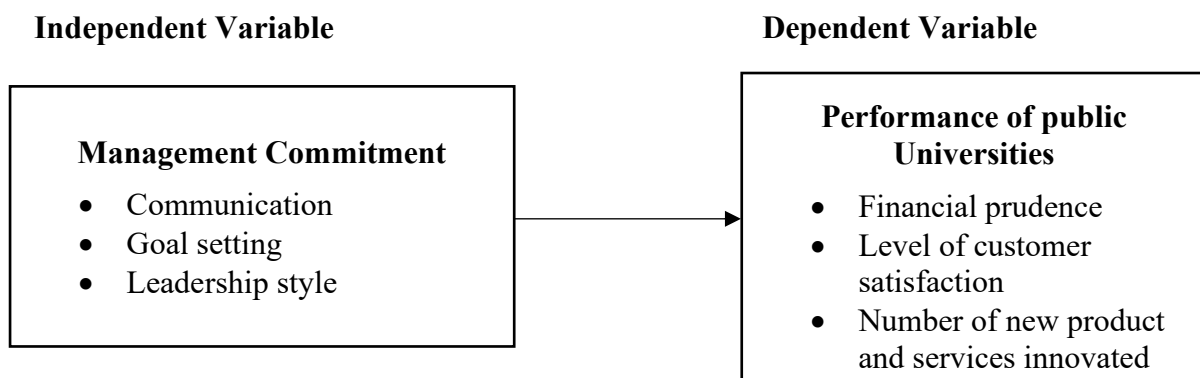


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

A descriptive research design was used to examine the influence of management commitment on the performance of public universities in Kenya. The study focused on all 35 chartered public universities, adopting a census approach given the small, manageable population. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires administered both in person and electronically, with a pilot study conducted to refine the instruments and ensure clarity and effectiveness. Reliability and validity of the research instruments were ensured through statistical tests, including Cronbach's alpha (all values above 0.7 indicating reliability) and factor analysis (KMO = 0.709, $p < 0.05$ confirming validity). Data analysis was conducted using MS Excel and SPSS, employing descriptive and inferential statistics, such as regression, to determine relationships between variables. The results were presented in tables using Likert-scale measurements to quantify responses and support the interpretation of findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive statistics

4.1.1 Period of implementation of strategic plans

The implementation period for the strategic plans varied. The Universities that implemented the plans for 5 years or less were 10, representing 33.3%. Those that implemented the plans between 6-10 years were 11, representing 36.8%, while those that implemented the strategic plans for 11-15 years were 7, representing 23.3%. 16-20-year-olds had 1 university, and those over 20 years had 1 university.

The distribution of implementation periods for strategic plans across universities highlights a lack of consistency and standardization. It suggests a potential lack of clarity in setting realistic goals and in establishing realistic timelines for achieving them. The majority of universities fall within the 6–10-year range, indicating that they require a significant amount of time to execute their strategic plans. This may reflect the complex challenges these institutions face, potentially affecting their ability to adapt to and respond to evolving needs and trends.

The presence of universities that took more than 20 years to implement their strategic plans raises concerns about efficiency and effectiveness in strategic planning processes. It may indicate a need for improved planning, resource allocation, and implementation strategies to ensure timely and successful implementation. All 30 universities implemented strategic plans, with 20 implemented within the anticipated time (66.7%), while 10 did not (33.3%). The fact that all 30 universities implemented strategic plans indicates a positive commitment towards long-term goals and growth.

However, the percentage of universities that implemented their plans within the anticipated timeframe (66.7%) suggests that many institutions faced challenges or delays in executing their strategies. The implication of 33.3% of universities not implementing their plans within the anticipated time is that there might be factors hindering successful implementation. These factors could include inadequate resources, changing priorities, lack of proper planning or coordination, or unforeseen circumstances. It highlights the importance of regularly reviewing strategies to ensure alignment with the evolving needs and challenges faced by universities. During the period under review, 7 universities reviewed the plans annually (23.3%), 5 reviewed them every 2-3 years (16.7%), and 16 reviewed them every 4-5 years (53.3%). Respondents from 2 universities asserted that they didn't know whether there was a review of strategic plans, which represented 6.7% of the total.

The distribution of strategic plan review periods across universities shows that while some institutions review their plans annually, the majority conduct reviews every 4-5 years. This indicates a mixed approach to frequency. Universities conducting annual reviews demonstrate a proactive and adaptable mindset, while those reviewing every 4-5 years may risk missing opportunities or challenges in a rapidly evolving landscape. The presence of universities unsure about plan reviews highlights the need for improved communication and awareness. Regular and timely plan reviews are crucial for universities to remain responsive and aligned with their goals, necessitating clear processes, stakeholder engagement, and resource allocation.

Table 1: Period of Implementing Strategic Plans

Period of Implementing Strategic Plans	Frequency	Percent
5 years and below	10	33.3
6-10 years	11	36.7
11-15 years	7	23.4
16-20 years	1	3.3
Above 20 years	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0
Whether the University Develops Strategic Plans		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	30	100
Total	30	100.0
Anticipated Implementation Time Frame		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes	20	66.7
No	10	33.3
Total	30	100.0
Period of Review of Strategic Plans		
	Frequency	Percent
Annually	7	23.3
2-3 years	5	16.7
4-5 years	16	53.3
Don't know	2	6.7
Total	30	100.0

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics for Implementation of Strategic Plan

With a mean score of 4.14, respondents showed widespread consensus on carrying out the strategic initiatives. In particular, the respondents, on average, agreed that the institutions had successfully implemented the strategic plan over five years. The responses were very dissimilar, as indicated by the greatest standard deviation (1.124). According to survey respondents, the university's performance has increased dramatically since the strategic plan was developed, and there is efficient collaboration across different groups within the organization. (4.00), and a timetable for accomplishing such objectives was established (4.33 on a 5-point scale, with the corresponding standard deviation of .606 demonstrating the least variation (5-point scale).

Furthermore, the respondents generally believed that public universities encourage stakeholder involvement in the implementation of strategic plans (4.10) and that strategy objectives are communicated to staff at all levels in a timely, clear, and adequate manner (3.90).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Implementation of the Strategic Plans

Implementation of the Strategic Plans	Mean	Std. Deviation
Over the past five years, the institution's strategic plan has been put into action.	4.33	1.124
After implementing the strategic plan, the university's performance increased dramatically.	4.23	.858
Staff members effectively collaborate across teams, departments, and divisions to implement the company's strategic goal.	4.10	.712
The institutional setting is optimal for carrying out the university's strategic goals.	4.00	.788
The deadline for accomplishing the given objectives was established.	4.33	.606
The university encourages everyone with a stake in the strategic plan's success to get involved in its implementation.	4.10	.995
There is adequate, clear, and timely communication of strategic objectives to the employees at all levels.	3.90	.960
Averages	4.14	0.863

4.1.3 Descriptive Statistics for Management Commitment

The mean average of 3.95 indicated that the respondents agreed that the universities had management commitment, and the standard deviation of .897 indicated moderate variation. Under communication of management commitment, there is adequate, clear, and timely communication of strategic objectives to employees at all levels, as agreed, with a mean of 3.90 and a standard deviation of 0.960.

The institution's senior leadership communicated with the staff on how to implement strategic plans, which was agreed to with a mean of 3.83 and a standard deviation of .950. The institution has created a receptive atmosphere for communication with staff, as agreed, with a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of .828 Under the goal setting of management commitment, the top management sets goals and objectives effectively within a stipulated time, as agreed upon, with a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of .712. Under the management commitment leadership style, our top leaders make quick decisions that are agreed to, with a mean of 3.77; the corresponding standard deviation of 1.040 indicates the highest variation. Our leaders provide the necessary support and advice that lead to our success, as agreed in 4.03, and the top leaders also empower employees and encourage individual growth and development, as agreed, with a mean of 3.93.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Management Commitment

Management Commitment	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is adequate, clear, and timely communication of strategic objectives to the employees at all levels.	3.90	.960
The institution's senior leadership communicates with the staff on how to implement strategic plans	3.83	.950
The institution has set a receptive atmosphere for communication with staff	4.07	.828
Top management sets goals and objectives effectively within the stipulated time.	4.10	.712
Our top leaders make quick decisions	3.77	1.040
Our leaders provide the necessary support and advice that leads to our success	4.03	.964
The top leaders empower employees and encourage individual growth and development.	3.93	.828
Averages	3.95	0.897

4.1.4 Descriptive Statistics for Organizational Performance

The overall mean of 3.87 indicated that respondents agreed that universities had improved performance due to strategy implementation. On financial prudence, the respondents agreed that the institution plans well in advance and manages the available financial resources effectively, with a mean of 4.10. Variation in replies to this statement was moderate, as indicated by an SD of .885.

Regarding customer satisfaction, the respondents agreed that our customers (both internal and external) are satisfied with our academic programs and services, with a mean of 3.70 and an SD of .794, indicating low variation in responses.

Finally, on the number of products and services innovated, the respondents agreed that the number of products (academic programs) and services innovated in the institution is commendable, with a mean of 3.80. The consistent SD of 1.031 was the largest, indicating that the responses were highly variable.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Organization Performance

Organization Performance	Mean	Std. Deviation
The institution plans well in advance and manages its financial resources effectively.	4.10	.885
Our customers (both internal and external) are satisfied with our academic programs and services.	3.70	.794
The number of products (academic programs) and services innovated in the institution is commendable.	3.80	1.031
Averages	3.87	0.903

4.2 Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was conducted to assess the effect of management commitment on organizational performance. Coefficient results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Coefficients of the Regression Model

Model	Unstd	Coefficients	Std	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
(Constant)	.489	.179	Beta	2.734	.011
Management Commitment(X)	.408	.065	.462	6.277	.000
a. Dependent	Variable:	Organization	Performance		

The results indicate that management commitment increases organizational performance by 0.462 units. Based on the coefficients and their interpretations, the strategic plan's implementation, including management commitment, significantly affects the performance of public universities in Kenya. A higher level of management commitment is associated with increased organizational performance. Therefore, implementing strategic plans can positively impact the performance of public universities in Kenya by enhancing management commitment.

4.3 Tests of Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was that there is no relationship between managerial commitment and the performance of public Universities in Kenya. Table 4 shows that the level of managerial commitment at public Universities in Kenya significantly affects their performance ($B1 = 0.462$, $t = 6.277$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). For this reason, the research concluded that H_0 was not supported, and that managerial commitment significantly affects the performance of Public Universities in Kenya.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The survey on management commitment within Kenyan universities yielded a generally positive perception among respondents, with an overall mean of 3.95, indicating agreement that universities exhibit management commitment. This aligns with the empirical literature, particularly with the study by Jitpaiboon and Kalaian (2005), who explored the influence of

top management support on Information Systems (IS) performance in the United States. While their focus was on the business sector, the study highlighted the crucial role of top-level management endorsement in impacting IS output, resonating with the positive sentiments expressed by respondents in the current research. However, it's important to note potential contextual differences arising from variations in economic, business, and political environments.

The study reveals a robust relationship (correlation coefficient, $r=0.812$) between management commitment and organizational performance, with management commitment alone contributing significantly (40.8%, 0.408) towards organizational performance. This finding is consistent with Kiugu's (2021) study on communication and strategy implementation in the financial sector in Nakuru County, Kenya. Although Kiugu's study focused on a different industry, the emphasis on effective communication and its impact on strategy implementation resonates with the positive correlation found in the current research between management commitment and organizational performance.

Furthermore, Mwanthi's (2018) study of Kenyan universities found that communication positively influenced strategy implementation, aligning with the present study's emphasis on the role of communication in management commitment.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study establishes that management commitment plays a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of strategy implementation and the overall performance of public universities in Kenya. The findings indicate that universities generally demonstrate a positive orientation toward management commitment, particularly through clear communication of strategic objectives, supportive leadership practices, and structured goal-setting. These elements help create an enabling environment for successful strategy execution. However, variations in leadership decision-making suggest the need for greater consistency and inclusivity in managerial practices to strengthen implementation outcomes.

Overall, the study affirms that strong and sustained management commitment is essential for enhancing institutional performance. Universities that prioritize leadership support, effective communication, and alignment of strategic goals are better positioned to achieve their objectives. The study therefore emphasizes the need for university leadership to reinforce commitment at all levels, foster participatory decision-making, and institutionalize practices that support the successful implementation of strategic plans.

6. Recommendations

University management should prioritize fostering a strong culture of commitment. This can be achieved by ensuring clear and timely communication of strategic objectives to employees at all levels. Senior leadership should be empowered and supported to effectively implement strategic plans and provide the necessary guidance and advice to employees. Creating a receptive atmosphere for communication with staff and encouraging open dialogue and feedback will help improve the implementation of strategies.

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