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Going Back to the Basics: A Practical Approach to Strategy Implementation in Corporate Environments

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Abstract
Although several ambitious strategy plans are being developed in many organisations in Kenya, they consistently fail to achieve their desired goals because of weak strategy implementation. An ongoing disconnect between formulation and execution continues to be one of the biggest obstacles to organisational performance in the public and private sectors. The researcher discussed the factors that affect the successful implementation of strategies in Kenyan organisations. The researcher specifically examined the classical management functions, the 5Ws and 1H model, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems from the perspective of the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, and the resources and capabilities of the firm. The researcher employed a qualitative research design with a secondary data approach. A systematic literature search was done on Google Scholar on the Kenyan studies published from 2000 to 2025. Thematic analysis was used to analyse 18 relevant sources. Three key themes were developed, which were closely interconnected: (a) Leadership and management functions (planning, organising, leading, controlling), (b) Resource allocation and internal capabilities (valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable; VRIN) as highlighted by RBV, and (c) Continuous M&E facilitated by the 5Ws and 1H framework for adaptive execution. These factors emerged in the reviewed literature as commonly associated with implementation success. Effective implementation of strategies requires not only individual application of these frameworks but also their use in an integrated way. The management functions should be strengthened in organisations, and the internal capacities of organisations should be systematically mobilised. The three factors identified in this review may collectively account for observed variance in implementation outcomes; empirical testing is required to establish effect sizes.

Introduction
It is widely accepted that strategic planning and strategic implementation are two separate but interdependent steps of corporate management. The formulation-implementation sequence is also recursive, in that implementation is likely to influence subsequent strategy revisions and refinements (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). The key to success, and often failure, lies in the effective ability to move the strategic plan into action. However, poor implementation is a major drawback to the realisation of even a well-drafted strategy, and one of the main reasons many organisations fail to achieve the results they desire from their strategy. Studies suggest that many strategic plans are unsuccessful because of how they are executed rather than the strategies themselves, for example, due to resource

misallocation, structural misalignment, poor translation of the strategic plan by middle managers, and ineffective feedback mechanisms (Bryson et al., 2009; Parmenter, 2020). While much attention is focused on strategy formulation, most organisations are still grappling with strategy execution. It leads to a big question: “Why do effective strategies fail to work effectively when they are put into practice?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the key issues that facilitate the successful implementation of a strategy. In particular, it examines the impact of management roles, leadership alignment, effective communication, and resource allocation on successful execution. The study also examines how to use the 5 Ws and 1H to break down strategic goals into smaller, actionable pieces. It also emphasises the importance of ongoing, real-time M&E for taking timely corrective actions during implementation (Kusek & Rist, 2004). Lastly, the paper adopts the Resource-Based View (RBV) to understand how internal resources and capabilities can be used to support effective strategy execution. Organisations can go beyond a clear strategy to achieve stable, consistent implementation by incorporating these elements. The approach focuses on practical, non-purely theoretical fundamentals and connects abstract strategy models to actionable organisational practices.

The problem statement

In Kenya, many organisations have far-sighted strategies but fail to deliver the desired outcomes. This disconnect between the framing and implementation of a strategy is widely known in the context of Kenya and has been attributed to several factors, including weak implementation processes, poor communication, inconsistent leadership support, and ineffective resource allocation (Aosa, 1992; Kihara, 2017). Kihara (2017) argued that there is a positive and significant relationship between strategy implementation and performance. However, implementation challenges, which severely constrain the overall performance of organisations, are consistently noted in empirical research on public and private sector organisations in Kenya, including research on state corporations and county governments. There is a clear need for practical frameworks to improve the success rate of strategy implementation and for increased leadership alignment and monitoring systems.

Literature review

This section examines the empirical research and theoretical frameworks about the execution of strategic plans within an organisation. It examines the independent factors in connection with the dependent variable and establishes the conceptual framework. After identifying the research gaps and critiquing the evaluated literature, the study concludes with a section summary.

Theoretical framework

One of the important theoretical approaches used to explain the success of strategy implementation is the RBV. RBV, developed by Barney (1991) and based on the ideas of Wernerfelt (1984) and Penrose (1959), suggests that sustained competitive advantage comes from the valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) internal resources and capabilities of an organisation. From the implementation of strategies, RBV highlights that how an organisation can leverage its internal resources, including human capital, technological assets, organisational processes, and culture, for effective deployment and orchestration is more important than the external market conditions in determining competitive outcomes. The difference between resources (assets) and capabilities (the firm's ability to utilise these assets; Grant, 1991) is critical. In addition, strategy implementation may be carried out in a constantly changing environment, and organisations need the capability to reconfigure resources and respond to new environments (Teece et al., 1997). The study utilised the RBV framework to explore the potential for Kenyan organisations to leverage existing resources and capabilities to mitigate barriers to strategy implementation.

The main contention of the resource-based view (RBV) is that even when a company has clear objectives, the availability of resources frequently limits how the mission will be carried out (Rangan, 2004). To develop resource-driven capabilities and ultimately gain a competitive edge, the RBV focuses on the use and deployment of resources. According to Arbab Kash et al. (2014), a company's resources might be either internal or external, purchased, or already owned by the company. A company's competitive edge will ultimately depend on how it organises and uses these resources.

Without the right training, equipment, and direction, even the most talented employees can struggle to be an effective part of the solution in strategy implementation. Effective implementation, however, requires the coordination and integration of the resources to achieve those strategic goals. In organisations where human capital, technology and supporting systems are systematically matched, the likelihood of achieving better performance outcomes is significantly higher.

Strategy implementation and management functions

The most common and well-known difficult aspect of the strategic management process is strategy implementation. Although strategy development may be an intellectual activity, its implementation requires discipline, resource allocation, and effective leadership. Kaplan and Norton (2008) argued that successful strategy implementation depends on the alignment of all organisational functions with strategic objectives.

One of the cornerstones of effective strategy implementation is management functions. The classical management process of planning, organising, leading, and controlling (POLC), as suggested by Fayol (1916) and adopted by Koontz and O'Donnell (1955), remains highly applicable to strategy implementation. These functions help to specify the organisational mechanisms that turn strategic intentions into organisational action. The response to change is also essential for overcoming resistance and adjusting to the new realities of implementation. This study therefore looks at the application (and sometimes misapplication) of these key management functions in implementing strategies within Kenyan organisations.

Planning: the stage where the plan is designed. It consists of generating intelligent goals and allocating the resources necessary to achieve them. Strategies should not be ad hoc, and without a plan, they may be disorganised.

Organising: This role involves allocating human, financial, and technological resources to ensure effective strategy implementation. It also entails structuring the organisation to facilitate the strategy.

Leading: The implementation of the strategy needs leaders who mentor and motivate the employees to work in the same direction. Being a leader involves not only making decisions but also convincing and inspiring people to implement the strategy.

Controlling: In the Fayol/Koontz tradition, the cybernetic aspect of controlling involves establishing performance standards, tracking progress, measuring accomplishments, and taking corrective action (Fayol, 1916; Koontz & O'Donnell, 1955). It goes beyond monitoring to give feedback and strategic alignment. If there are no controls, deviations go unnoticed, which then negatively affects the implementation of the strategy.

But to coordinate and integrate across the departments during strategy implementation, the successful use of these management functions (planning, organising, leading, and controlling) is required but is not sufficient. Even with these functions, their misalignment across departments is a frequent source of implementation problems (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Galbraith et al., 2002).

The 5 Ws and 1 H Model

The 5Ws and 1H model (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How) is an easy-to-follow and effective way to break down complex strategies into smaller, more manageable pieces. Based on the poem “I Keep Six Honest Serving-Men” by Rudyard Kipling, published in 1902, the model ensures that all key components of a strategic plan are clearly identified, thereby improving the clarity and effectiveness of implementation. The framework is used in business and strategic planning, as it helps managers address the big questions, they need to answer to implement a successful strategy.

Who: Identifies the specific individuals, teams, or units responsible for execution, clarifying accountability and ownership.

What: Defines the precise tasks, deliverables, and activities required to achieve strategic objectives.

When: Establishes clear timelines, milestones, and sequencing of actions to prevent delays and ensure coordinated execution.

Where: Specifies the organisational units, departments, or geographic locations where implementation will occur.

Why: Articulates the strategic rationale and expected benefits, which are critical for securing employee and stakeholder commitment.

How: Details the methods, processes, resources, and approaches needed to execute the strategy effectively.

Monitoring and evaluation

M&E constitutes two complementary but different functions. On the one hand, monitoring is the continuous and systematic collection, analysis, and use of information on specified indicators to track progress toward planned objectives and support timely management decisions during project execution. On the other hand, evaluation is the periodic and objective assessment of a project’s design, implementation, and results to determine its relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, thereby informing accountability, learning, and future decision-making. Effective M&E systems are key to the continuous improvement process central to implementation. They deliver real-time performance information, which can help the organisation identify any issues, varying conditions, or unexpected results and adjust in time (Mohamud & Nyandoro, 2024). For example, a company that has decided to expand its markets may find that, during the expansion, customer demand and tastes have changed due to new players or economic factors. An effective M&E system enables the organisation to detect such deviations in a timely manner and apply corrective measures successfully (Kusek & Rist, 2004).

The influence of M&E capacity building or improvement (i.e., capacity-strengthening) programs has not yet been measured, especially in the African context, despite increasing demand for M&E capacity to meet the need for reliable proof to facilitate strategic choices, guide resource allocation, show development outcomes, and enhance overall performance, according to the literature (Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018; Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017). One of the main causes of the lack of measurement is the lack of agreement on the definition of M&E capacity, which is known as "conceptual ambiguity" around M&E capacity. As a result, it is challenging to gauge the impact of initiatives aimed at strengthening M&E capacity (Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017). The literature indicates that most M&E capacity-strengthening interventions have not produced the anticipated results, despite substantial resources devoted to enhancing African nations' ability to track and assess their performance and the effects of their development programmes and policies (Mackay, 2007; Tarsilla, 2014). The efforts made, according to Tarsilla (2014), have largely ignored the long-term consequences of M&E capacity-strengthening projects in favour of quantifying their short-term effects. Additionally, research shows that measuring the impact of M&E capacity-strengthening programmes is similarly difficult, as it can take many forms and occur at the individual, organisational, or system level (Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017). To enhance the efficiency of M&E, organisations must not take it as a box-ticking exercise. Rather, they should use M&E to have significant team-based conversations concerning what is working and what is not, and to take timely action based on lessons learned.

Method

In this study, secondary data analysis with a qualitative approach was used. A systematic literature review was utilised to analyse the factors that affect the implementation of effective strategies.

Data sources and search strategy

Google Scholar was used to search for relevant literature in this study. Search terms included: Strategy Implementation, Strategy Implementation barriers, Resource-based view AND Strategy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation in Strategy Implementation, Strategy Implementation in Kenya. The search encompassed the years 2000 to 2025.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Articles and reports were added if they (a) addressed issues related to the implementation of strategy or success factors and (b) were peer-reviewed or from a well-known institution. Studies that lacked an empirical basis or focused solely on strategy formulation were excluded.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. The codes of emerging patterns were categorised under the theoretical frameworks of the RBV and classical management functions. In addition, a narrative synthesis was used to combine findings from the different sources. The methodological design ensures transparency, reproducibility, and analytical rigour, aligning with the research goals.

The literature review revealed three broad themes of challenges and success factors in the implementation of strategies in Kenya through iterative coding: Leadership, management functions and organisational alignment, resource allocation and internal capabilities (related to RBV), and monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive execution (with structured tools like the 5Ws and 1H model).

Ethical Consideration

This study is conceptual and uses only secondary data from publicly available sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, books, institutional reports, and published case studies. No primary data was collected, and the participants were not part of the research process; therefore, no ethical clearance was necessary. Despite this, the highest level of academic honesty was maintained throughout the study. Sources have been cited and referenced in line with the rules of the scholarly community. The authors' ideas have been fairly represented, and no data or findings have been fabricated or misrepresented. This is consistent with guidelines for conducting secondary research set forth by academic and professional institutions.

Results

Thematic analysis of the eighteen selected Kenyan studies identified three interconnected themes that are consistently used to account for the challenges and success factors in implementing the strategy. These themes are explored below and linked to the study’s theoretical and practical underpinnings.

Discussion

Theme 1: Leadership, management functions, and organisational alignment

A key thread through the literature is the importance of good leadership in strategy implementation and the classical functions of management: planning, organising, leading, and controlling. Very poor leadership commitment, inadequate interdepartmental coordination, and inappropriate implementation of these functions have been identified as common causes of strategic plans being lost at the implementation stage in several studies conducted on public and private organisations in Kenya.

According to a study by Kamuri et al. (2025), the alignment of organisational culture had a statistically significant F-statistic, suggesting it impacted the performance of Kenyan state businesses. The F-statistic decreased when transformational leadership was added to the regression model as a moderating variable, suggesting that transformational leadership influences the strength of these correlations. Although these decreases are statistically insignificant across all instances, the persistent underlying relationship suggests that transformational leadership still plays a meaningful contextual role in shaping these dynamics. Kamuri et al. (2025) argued that the cultural alignment process affects the performance of Kenyan State Corporations. This implies that state companies ought to have a well-defined plan for cultural alignment, as well as lines of communication with all parties involved. In the same way, Amoni et al. (2025) conducted a study that looked at how strategic alignment and the following measures of facilitating NGOs' performance in Northern Kenya affected their overall effectiveness: strategic planning, uniformity of goals, distribution of resources, and communication standards, and found a strong positive correlation between strategic alignment and NGO performance. In another study, Were et al. (2026) discovered that, although bureaucratic rigidity negatively affected implementation, organisational adaptability, mission alignment, and cultural alignment positively affected change management. Were et al. concluded that supportive cultures, flexible organisational structures, and a clear organisational purpose were all associated with greater employee engagement, reduced resistance to change and enhanced institutional performance. Moreover, Barasa et al. (2025) found that key factors affecting process alignment in public health institutions include the clarity of roles and responsibilities, strategy-aligned metrics, and a culture of continuous improvement. Therefore, process alignment is a key success factor in reaching organisational success. It was demonstrated that strong leadership promotes alignment, motivates employees and instils accountability, all of which are crucial to bridging the gap between strategy formulation and implementation.

Theme 2: Resource allocation and internal capabilities (RBV perspective)

Many studies focused on the importance of identifying, mobilising, and deploying the internal resources and capabilities of an organisation for success in strategy implementation, as suggested by the Resource-Based View (RBV) of Barney (1991). According to a study by Nyakio et al. (2024), the Kenya Revenue Authority's performance was positively and significantly impacted by resource allocation. The study recommended the optimal allocation of resources based on the strategic objectives to enhance operational efficiency. Likewise, resource allocation has positive and appreciable effects on the organisational performance of cement manufacturing companies in Kenya (Ali et al., 2022).

A study by Abdi et al. (2024) found a positive and significant relationship between resource allocation and the organisational performance of Nairobi County's charitable NGOs. The report recommends that budgeting for financial resources be put at the forefront of their activities to allocate resources efficiently across programmes and activities. In a similar vein, Sadiq (2019) found that water services boards' performance was positively impacted by strategic personnel development, strategic financial resources, strategic infrastructure development, and strategic technological deployment.

Organisations in Kenya with VRIN resources, such as skilled people, organisational culture, and technological infrastructure, showed much higher implementation success rates. The analysis showed that having resources alone is not enough; the ability to coordinate and reconfigure them is also required to implement strategic projects.

Theme 3: Monitoring, evaluation and adaptive execution

The third key theme is the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in strategy implementation. The reviewed literature consistently reported that organisations with effective M&E practices tracked their progress more effectively, detected deviations earlier, and took corrective action when necessary. For example, Oketch and Ndungu (2025) conducted a study to investigate the role of capacity building in the M&E of community-based project performance. Findings indicate that the beneficiaries were always informed about the project's objectives. The study proved that the training sessions were pertinent. Wachira and Mutuku (2024) concluded that project monitoring and assessment are enhanced by the presence of proper policies. Macharia and Omondi (2020) found that the effectiveness of development initiatives is linked to the strength of the M&E team and the suitability of the M&E approach adopted. Additionally, Mugo (2025) found highly significant positive associations between healthcare project performance and the various M&E components. In the context of Kenya's evolving business landscape, real-time or continuous M&E played a crucial role, as the market conditions, regulatory shifts, and economic fluctuations necessitated swift adaptation. This theme is well aligned with the 5Ws and 1H model. The literature indicates that planning using the 5Ws and 1H framework leads to the development of clear performance indicators that enable more effective, actionable monitoring. The organisations that used the 5Ws and 1H technique in combination with robust M&E systems performed better in terms of coordination, accountability, and adaptability during implementation. M&E is thus a mechanism of control and a learning system that allows for the adaptation of strategies in response to new realities encountered.

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that effective strategy implementation is not just about complex planning, but also about the strategic use of the 5Ws and 1H, robust monitoring and evaluation processes, and the strategic allocation of internal resources and capabilities, as defined in the RBV. Together, they provide a practical solution for organisations to address common implementation challenges, including a lack of coordination, resource misalignment, and feedback mechanisms. In Kenya, where many organisations still face a significant disconnect between strategy formulation and implementation, these principles can make a huge difference to the success of their outcomes. The key to any strategy's success lies not in its idealised simplicity or beauty of conception, but in its discipline, flexibility, and diligence of execution. Systems that are grounded in these time-tested principles and consistently leveraged, yet agile enough to respond to live feedback, are more likely to deliver tangible results for strategic objectives.

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