Employee Participation in Strategic Planning: A Practical Experience of Technical Education and Training Institutions in Tanzania

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Abstract	NG Journal of Social Development

This study assessed employee involvement in strategic planning (SP) in public technical education and training institutions (TVETIs). It addressed who initiates the SP process in TVETIs. Primary data were collected through key informant interviews and questionnaires from four planning directors and 277 experienced employees. The directors were sampled using purposive sampling, while the employees were sampled using convenience and stratified sampling techniques. The data collected from in depth interview were analysed using content analysis, whereas data collected via questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics. It was found that management initiated the SP process. It was found that planning officers, management, and the council are heavily involved, while employees have minimal participation in the SP formulation. The methods used in SP formulation predominantly reach management and others but only reach employees to a very limited extent. Consequently, the level of awareness regarding all aspects of SP inquired about was low. It was concluded that employees' participation in the SP process within TVETIs is significantly limited. Therefore, this study advises the management of the surveyed institutions and the education sector to actively involve employees in SP formulation to foster a sense of ownership and motivation for successful SP implementation.

1. Introduction

The strategic planning (SP) conception and practice has been advocated worldwide in private and public institutions due to its supposed significant influence on employee and organisational performance (Yangailo, 2024; Nnko, 2024; Raphael et al., 2018; Arasa & K'Obonyo, 2012; Owolabi & Makinde, 2012). The SP is the management tool that has been given sustained eminence in the administration of public services for efficient and effective performance in achieving their respective focus and energy on goals (Gitonga, 2013). The SP is indispensable for employee and organisational performance in various institutions regardless of their management and economic growth (Suklev & Debarliev, 2012). The SP facilitates the employees' work toward the goals and direction of the institutions in which they work (Gitonga, 2013). This means that the institution's mission, vision, objectives, strategies and values are reflected in the SP. This reflection speeds up the employee and organisational motivation for performance. Therefore, the SP facilitates employee performance by formulating, implementing, and evaluating detailed and specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) annual operation plans that are reflected and extracted from the SP (Raphael et al., 2018). This is to say that the SP has been widely used to govern organisation operations across developed and developing countries.

The SP was introduced in Tanzanian public institutions, ministries and agencies in 2002 to acknowledge its significance in realising employee and institutional performance (Raphael et al., 2018). The public institutions were then increasingly necessitated to have SP to chart their goals and as a management tool in their performance plans. One such public institutions are Technical Education and Training Institutions (TVETIs). In other words, the TVETIs likewise adopted SP in 2005 as they were part and parcel of what is happening in Tanzania and the world (Raphael et al., 2018). By adopting SP, the TVETIs intended to define their respective purpose clearly; obtain a framework for decision making; identify and establish future opportunities and threats; obtain the basis for measuring staff and institutional performance; and improve productivity in teaching and training, research and publications, and consultancy and community services (Owolabi & Makinde, 2012). However, there was evidence of the various challenges in the body of knowledge the TVETIs faced after adopting the SP in 2005. These challenges in the TVETIs involved poor awareness of the SP by the employee, lack of employee involvement in the SP process, funds and budget constraints; poor knowledge among the employee on SP; interference of political policies (directives) and inadequate or underutilisation of physical and human resources (Raphael et al., 2018). The absence of employee involvement makes the employees unaware of the SP, hence poor implementation in the TVETIs. Specifically, the lack of employee participation in the SP process directly affects the SP implementation since the employees are the significant parties in the implementation (Raphael et al., 2018). On the other hand, employee involvement in each SP stage increases operational plans' execution, creates ownership and brings employees to life and positive implementation. The SP process contributes to employees' participation in organisational governance for knowledge creation and sustainability of practices.

2. Statement of the Problem

Specifically, employee participation in the SP process is important for successfully implementing strategic objectives, particularly in the global, African, national and local public sectors (Nnko,

2024). This is because engaging employees in strategic planning enhances knowledge, expertise, and perspectives for successful implementation and the right results. Regardless of such engagement, the lack of awareness of employees on the existence of the strategic plan and employee involvement in the process of strategic plan formulation is one of the challenges facing strategic plan implementation in the public sector, including TVETs (Raphael et al., 2018; Kinemo, 2020; Nnko, 2024). Raphael et al. (2018) addressed SP in TVETIs. However, the given study is not comprehensive enough regarding employee participation and involvement in the SP process, bearing in mind that they (employees) are the key players in implementing the SP. In addition, Kinemo (2020) and Nnko (2024) addressed employee involvement as one of the major challenges of SP implementation in the public sector in Tanzania. However, both studies (Raphael et al., 2018; Kinemo, 2020; Nnko, 2024) lack detailed qualitative and descriptive insight regarding employee participation in SP in such public institutions. Additionally, the given studies addressed management involvement in SP, but they lacked a comprehensive nature of involvement of the management in SP. This study specifically addresses the gaps noted in the study by Raphael et al. (2018) in TVETIs. Therefore, this study addressed the gaps in TVETIs by specifically answering the following questions:

i. Who initiates the SP process in TVETIs??
ii. To what extent are the employees involved in the SP Formulation in TVETIs?
iii. To what extent does the used means in SP formulation reach out to the employee compared to the management/others?
iv. What is your level of awareness of SP in your institution?

Addressing employee involvement in SP gives the base of backing up SP implementation in the public sector, specifically TVETIs in Tanzania. This paper establishes the true nature of employee involvement in SP for future improvement. According to the classical motivation theory, employee involvement motivates employees to exert more effort on work efficiently and control their work for better performance (Benson & Lawler, 2013). When involved in work planning, employees work harder and smarter in institutions (Cotton, 1993; Lawler, 1986). Alternatively, motivation theory underlies that employee motivation creates an effective work system (Ichniowski et al., 1995).

2.1 Theoretical Framework
Arnstein put forward theoretical work on participation in 1969, which propounded the Ladder of Participation. Arnstein's work stems from the explicit recognition that there are different levels of participation. The levels range from the first level with manipulation and therapy of citizens, which are categorised as non-participation. The second is the degree of tokenism, which involves informing, consultation and placation. The third and last level is the degree of citizen power encompassing partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. This model provides relevant typologies of SP participation that can distinguish various actors' practices in the planning process.

The adoption of the typology of citizen power with employee control, delegated power and partnership indicates that SP involvement is advanced. This indicates that employees have their say in the negotiation process in the SP process. The top leadership actors assume the same playground level as other actors, such as the management, lower-level administration, and normal employees in institutions in negotiation processes. The typology of tokenism, which holds

consultation, information, and placation, implies that employees are not part of the decision-making process. This excludes professional and employees' work values from the institution's SP process and decisions. The non-participation typology outlines therapy and manipulation as core elements of the interaction of actors within SP planning and governance. This means that there is no participation at this level among employees. The limitations of Arnstein's framework include assuming that the lowest level of participation experiences an absence of participation. It ignores the aspect of power that exists at any level, even in situations where there could be non-participation (manipulation and therapy) in the SP process. The model also assumes that each step represents a broad category, within which there is likely to be a wide range of experiences of participation style and processes. For example, at the level of 'informing,' there could be significant differences in the type and quality of the information conveyed in SP planning. Realistically, therefore, levels of participation by employees, particularly in the SP process, are likely to reflect a more complex continuum than a simple series of steps. However, the model is relevant to this article due its ability to reflect the various levels and actors of participation that may prove evidence in the practice of strategic planning process.

3. Methodology

The article is based on a study that involved the technical higher learning institutions in Tanzania. These were the National Institute of Transport (NIT) and Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology (DIT) in Dar es Salaam city, Arusha Technical College (ATC) in Arusha city, and Karume Institute of Technology in Zanzibar. The institutions were chosen due to their similar operating characteristics. They adopted and adapted SP when introduced in Tanzania, and emphatically, almost during the same time, the institutions were expected to perform more after adopting SP; however, their performance was still low, especially in research and consultancy services (Raphael et al., 2018). It employed a mixed methods approach where the quantitative data were first collected before the qualitative data for complementation. The mixed approach facilitated the comprehensive understanding of employee involvement in the SP process, which was accompanied by a great diversity of views, opinions, experiences, and knowledge of TVETIs' employees. The given diversity enhanced confidence in the findings from the triangulation point of view.

This study used a case study and descriptive survey designs. A case study design was used due to the *"how"* and *"why"* questions and the contemporary phenomenon (i.e. SP) of the study in a real-life context (Yin, 2003). On the other hand, a descriptive survey design assisted in studying every employee and management team member's attitudes and characteristics covering a great geographical area, i.e. three TVETIs in different cities. The study's " what " questions also required a survey design (Yin, 2003).

This study surveyed the TVETIs' planning and innovation directors and experienced employees. The directors were the key informants of the SP process in TVETIs. The information from the directors was triangulated with the information from experienced employees. The respondents surveyed were the right ones to prove or disapprove of whether the staff is or is not involved in the TVETIs.

The multi-sampling technique was applied in this study, and the population was identified purposively, randomly stratified, and eventually conveniently approached for data collection. The purposive sampling technique facilitated to identify the planning/innovation directors and experienced employee who best suited to attend the questions of this study. In other words, it enabled the identification and selection of information-rich planning directors and experienced employees related to the specific questions of the study at hand. Furthermore, the stratified random sampling technique was used to stratify the purposively selected experienced employees into strata of their background information to ensure that almost every case of the employee is included in the study. Finally, the convenience sampling technique was used to win the participation of the employees who were readily available and willing to participate in the study. The convenience sampling allowed data gathering from 281 respondents (277 employees and four planning/innovation directors).

The data were collected using interviews, documentary reviews, and questionnaire survey. The key informant interview provided detailed information on the SP process's involvement in the TVETIs. A documentary review was used to review several pieces of literature on the topic, which involved reading SP formulation meeting minutes, memos, and the previous and current SP documents. The questionnaire was used to obtain information regarding personal experiences and practices in SP process involvement from experienced employees. The questionnaire gave the experienced employee adequate time to give well-thought-out answers regarding their involvement in the SP process.

The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis of the collected text. This involved data collected through the interview method using an interview guide. The content analysis was done firstly with verbatim transcription and testing the assumptions regarding involvement in the SP process compared to responses from interviewees without reproducing them as the researcher's own. The responses were properly interpreted to conclude involvement in the SP process. The descriptive statistics method was employed to analyse data gathered quantitatively using questionnaires. This employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics aided in describing the nature of employee involvement in the SP process in terms of quantifiable characteristics.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Personal Information of the Respondents
Table 1 shows that males were 76% (n=211) and the females were 24% (n=66). The results reveal that male employees comprise the majority of the surveyed TVETIs. A similar Table establishes that 14% (n=40) had a diploma, 29% (n=79) had a bachelor's degree, 32% (n=90) had a master's degree, and 25% (n=68) had a PhD. The majority of the surveyed employees had master's degrees. The results likewise show that 34% (n=94) had no administrative positions; 27 (n=75) were coordinators of a particular unit or section; 22% (n=62) were heads of departments, and 17% (n=46) were the directors/principals of the TVETs. The majority of the employees had no administrative position.

Table 1: Personal Information of the Academic Staff

Personal Information	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	1. Male	211	76
	2. Female	66	24
	Total	**277**	**100**
	1. Diploma	40	14
	2. Bachelor Degree	79	29
Education Level	3. Masters' Degree	90	32
	4. PhD	68	25
	Total	**277**	**100**
	1. No Admin. Position	94	34
Administrative Position	2. Coordinators	75	27
	3. Head of Departments	62	22
	4. Directors/Principals	46	17
	Total	**277**	**100**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

Personal information likewise included the age and working experience of the employee. Concerning the variable age, the range of ages is from 30 to 60 years, with a mean of 45.98 and a standard deviation of 7.257. Most of the surveyed experienced employees aged between 39 and 53, as indicated in Table 2. Concerning the variable working experience, the range of experiences is from 5 to 27 years, with a mean of 12 and a standard deviation of 7. Most of the surveyed participants had working experience between 5 and 19 years, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age and Experience of the Academic Staff

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Age	277	30	60	45.98	7.257	-.031	.146	-.515	.292
Experience	277	5.00	27.00	12.0072	7.08284	.995	.146	-.335	.292
Valid N (listwise)	277								

Source: Survey Data, 2022

4.2 Initiation of the SP Process

This section answers the question, "Who *initiates the SP process in TVETIs?"* The study findings demonstrate that the SP preparation process is initiated by the planning and innovation head/director before it goes further to other concerned parties like management, council and necessary stakeholders. The planning and innovation office raises the need for SP preparation as it monitors and deals with the institution's planning, budget, and innovation issues. Any alerting issue concerning planning is cautioned and absorbed by the planning office. One of the interview respondents articulated about the practice of SP in the study area and said that:

"It is always the top management that initiates the SP preparation and formulation process in our institution before it goes to other parties like the planning and budgeting office, council and other stakeholders". (Interview with Planning Head/Director C on 16th September 2022).

These results are different from what was found by Raphael et al. (2018), which were only generated by the qualitative data. Quantitative results in Table 3 prove these new results. The results indicate that the majority (65%) of respondents agreed that the top management initiates the SP process before it goes to the planning office and other parties. In interviews, the respondents proved that the planning office coordinates the SP process initiated by the top management. Generally, these results display that the employees are not allowed to initiate the SP process; hence, they do not get involved in initiating the SP process. This can be linked to the level of participation in the placation according to Arestin's (1969) ladder of participation.

Table 3: Initiation of the SP Process in the TVETIs

Who initiates the SP Process in the TVETIs?		
Party	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Council/Board	20	7
Top Management	180	65
Planning Office	41	15
Employee	16	6
Other Stakeholders	20	7
Total	**277**	**100**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

4.3 Principal Parties Involved in the SP Formulation in TVETIs

Another question addressed in this study is, "Which *are the major parties involved in the whole SP Formulation after being initiated by the top management?"* In other words, "*To what extent are the employees involved in the SP Formulation in TVETIs?*" The results generally indicate that the planning officers, management, and the council get involved to a large extent in the SP formulation. In contrast, the employees get involved to a small extent.

"*The employee involvement in the SP formulation in our institution is not there at all. We, employees, are just involved in SP implementation; we even implement what we do not know is from the formulated SP. I have over 8 years of experience but have not seen the current.*

(Interview with Experienced Employee P on 23rd October 2022). These results are similar to what was found by Raphael et al. (2018). The justification of the given results is likewise given using the quantitative data, as shown in Table 4. In other words, the employee is involved in the SP process to a very small extent (76%), while the council/board, management and planning office are involved.

Table 4: Principal Parties Involved in the SP Formulation in TVETIs

"*To what extent are the employees involved in the SP Formulation in TVETIs?*" i.e.									
(Formulation of the strategy, mission, vision, core values, objectives, resource allocation)									
Scale	**Council/Board**		**Management**		**Planning Office**		**Employee**		**Other Stakeholders**	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
Very Small Extent	30	11	6	2	22	8	211	76	33	12
Small Extent	44	16	8	3	30	11	52	19	144	52

Neutral	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0	0	0
Large extent	152	55	80	29	166	60	8	3	42	15
Very large extent	51	18	183	66	53	19	6	2	58	21
Total	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

4.4 Means of Involvement in SP Formulation

It was significant to explore the means of involvement in SP formulation and whether the given means reach out to the employees in TVETIs. The questions were *"What are the means used to involve the parties in SP formulation?" "To what extent does the given means reach out to the employee compared to the management/others?"* The results show that the means used to involve parties in formulating SP are letters and/or memos, meetings, emails, text messages or calls, presentations and discussions, interviews and questionnaires. This means contacting parties such as the council/board, business/functional level management and planning office. However, the given means do not prepare for nor reach out to the employees to get them involved in SP formulation in TVETIs. These results are also proved by the quantitative results, as shown in Table 5, whereas the means used reach out to the management and others to a very large extent (55%) but reach out to the employee to a very small extent (64%).

"…it is through memos, letters and meetings the management, council and planning officers formulate the strategic plan however, and these means are not given employee…" (Interview with Planning Officer K on 17th September 2022).

Table 5: Means of Involvement in SP Formulation

Scale	Management (Board/Council, Business and Functional Management)		Employee	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very Small Extent	10	4	177	64
Small Extent	14	5	74	27
Neutral	3	1	0	0
Large extent	97	35	17	6
Very large extent	153	55	9	3
Total	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

4.5 Employee Awareness Level on SP in TVETIs

In this section, the question was, "What is your level of awareness of SP (vision, mission, values, strategic objectives, budget and resources allocated, timeline) in your institution?" Both qualitative and quantitative results show that most employees had a low awareness of the SP in the TVETs. The level of awareness on every aspect of SP asked was low, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Employee Awareness Level on SP in TVETIs

What is your awareness of your institution's SP (vision, mission, values, strategic objectives, budget and resources allocated timeline)?

Scale	Mission		Vision		Values		Strategic Objectives		Budget Allocation		Timeline	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
Low Level	194	**70**	186	67	150	54	202	73	189	68	155	56
Moderate Level	70	25	57	21	89	32	41	15	83	30	99	36
High Level	13	5	34	12	38	14	34	12	5	2	23	8
Total	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**	**277**	**100**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

The results are confirmed by qualitative results: "…We employees have a *very low level of awareness of SP generally and its aspects as you are asking. Ask every employee about what you ask me, and they will answer you. However, the true information you are asking we do not know in detail, but the management members know"* Interview with Experienced Employee Q on 20th September 2022).

Generally, the results of the study at hand reveal that employee involvement in SP in TVETIs is practised to a very small extent. The employees seem to implement the SP but do not get involved during the formulation process. Both qualitative and quantitative results prove the lack of employee involvement in SP compared to the management and other parties in TVETIs. These results are similar to what was found previously by Raphael et al. (2018) and Kinemo, 2020 (Nnko, 2024) in the public sector. The given studies just cited the issue of employee involvement as a challenge in SP implementation. The study reveals that the given challenge's comprehensiveness has now been submitted. This study shows that employee involvement is lacking at the SP formulation stage and not at the implementation stage. This implies that a lack of involvement during formulation causes poor awareness of employees on SP during implementation; hence, they do not own and are not motivated by what they implement. The given experience is related to employees' low level of participation in the SP process as per Anstein's ladder of participation. This indicates that when the information on SP formulation is given to deans/principals/directors of faculty/college/school/directorate and heads of departments, little is done to share anything or involve the employees in giving their views and opinions. In other words, the strategy, vision, mission, values, and objectives of the TVETIs are there, but employee involvement is lacking when setting them.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, employee involvement in the SP process is achieved through placations in TVETIs. This is a good level of employee participation in the SP process in this institution. It was revealed in some aspects- that the employees are not the ones who initiate the SP, and if the management initiates it, it does not reach them. Furthermore, the means to coordinate the SP formulation do not reach the employees. This results in a low awareness of SP among the employees in TVETIs, hence a lack of ownership and motivation during the implementation process. It was found that actors' involvement in the SP process in higher educational institutions was low. This study, therefore, informs that the SP process should be more participatory to effectively involve all actors, including employees and external stakeholders that are primary and secondary beneficiaries of the Institutions. The institutions' management and education sector must involve the employees in SP formulation to ensure a sense of ownership and motivation and effective SP implementation.

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