



**EFFECT OF SOCIAL PRESSURES ON STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE OF SERVICE STATE CORPORATION IN KENYA:
A CASE STUDY OF BUKURA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE**

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Wasike, V.,¹ Kadima, M. J.,² & Musiega, D.³

¹ Master Student: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology [JKUAT], Kenya

² Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology [JKUAT], Kenya

³ Ph.D, Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology [JKUAT], Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Success on a market varies over time and place; hence organizations change over time and so do the rules of the game. Consequently, for organizations to exist, prosper and prevail there will always be a need to understand the requirements shaped by the market dynamics and respond to them. State corporations like other organizations in Kenya, operate in an environment full of pressures which originate from social, professional, normative and regulatory sources. It is therefore vital for establishments to comprehend the relationship between institutional pressures and their performance. Specific objective of the study include; Investigation of the relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College. The study embraced descriptive survey research design. The target population of the study included staff employed at the Bukura Agricultural College. Stratified random sampling was used to select staff across departments while purposive sampling was used to select top management staff. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and an interview schedule. Pilot study was conducted on members of the college who were not part of the actual study. Data collected was processed and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 24). Relationship between independent and dependent variables was determined using Pearson's correlation coefficient, multiple linear regression analysis and cross tabulations. The study strived to establish whether social pressures significantly affected strategic performance of service State Corporation in Kenya. The findings of the study reflected Social Pressures had significant effect on Strategic Management of Bukura Agricultural College. The study recommended for the management to link institution pressures with Strategic Management practices for services improvement. More so the study recommended for further research using similar variables and different methods of analysis.

Key words: Social Pressures, Strategic Management

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INTRODUCTION

The greatness of any organization is embedded in its ability to conform and respond to various issues of change, an element that is unavoidable in day to day operations. Pursuing competitive advantage for sustainability and continuity, organizations channel resources and skills towards strategic responses to both internal and external pressures. In modern business environment, conformity to institutional pressures is not a case of if but rather a question of how. In the real sense every organization has to maneuver to find a way of complying with the pressures to balance the scale of performance.

In international organizations, administrators are often confronted with puzzling institutional pressures in different parts of the world. Kostova and Roth (2002) have studied the manner in which institutional pressures shake international firms. International affiliates face dual pressures; locally, from the host country context, as well as from the parent company located in another country – which faces a different set of institutional pressures. In their study, Kostova and Roth observed what happens in branches in different parts of the world when a large international firm tries to roll out a common set of quality management practices. They found that both working implementation and staff buy-in to the quality practices vary depending on the favorableness of the local institutional context. Amusingly, they find that coercion by the parent company is likely to lead to purely ritual adoption (implementation without buy-in) whilst dynamic adoption (high implementation and buy-in) was more likely in highly favorable normative and cognitive-cultural contexts. Finally, they also established that the nature of the power relationship between parent and secondary is important.

Organizational structures replicate extensive understanding of the social reality. Powerful institutional rules and regulations act as restructured myths that organizations incorporate in order to gain legitimacy, resources, and stability and enhanced survival prospects. Emphasis on

conformity has irregularly brought about underestimation of the role of interest and agency in adaptation to the institutional environment (Oliver, 1991; Hoffman, 1999). Several authors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995) have scrutinised institutional pressures that face organizations. They came up with four categories of institutional pressures: social, normative, regulatory and professional pressures.

Regulatory pressures are concerned with organizations being gratified to adhere to rules and regulations while social pressures are concerned with wider societal norms, professional pressures focus on focused norms while normative pressures refer to pressure of other people that lead us to conform to their demands. On that note, it is confirmed that there are several benefits that accrue from observing the above-mentioned institutional pressures. The benefits include but not limited to enhanced prestige, stability, legitimacy, social support, internal and external commitment, access to resources, attraction to personnel, fit into administrative categories, acceptance in professions, and also invulnerability to questioning (Scott; 1983).

Isomorphism is the leaning towards consistency and it describes a state where organizations are influenced to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing streamlined concepts of organizational work and established society. Isomorphism holds that, organizations that abide with the above mentioned enhance both their legitimacy and survival prospects. From that perception of isomorphism and the passive stance with regard to the institutional pressures, an organization has to deal with. Institutional theory covers three areas of strategic management; strategy, environment and organization. Isomorphism enables an organization to conform to the institutional pressures put upon it and that way; it maintains its legitimacy (Sminia, 2014).

The globalized world continues to experience strong pressures of economic and financial crises which result from a number of issues at stake. For the

sake of increasing legitimacy, organizations tend to adopt somehow similar or related reform packages which result to various institutional pressures which in turn end up affecting organizations performance (Grossi, Dobija & Strzelczyk, 2020). Previous studies in Europe demonstrated that institutions of Higher Learning were adopting reforms that aimed at responding to the institutional pressures exerted from both external and internal organizational environments (Ahrens & Khalifa, 2015; Grossi, Kallio, Sargiacomo, & Skoog, 2019). Furthermore, European organizations have worked tirelessly to improve their information systems as a result of institutional pressures exerted through the information security threats, an issue that has been on the increase. Establishment of regulatory pressures and normative pressures has not only helped the organizations realize stability in terms of information security but have also increased research in technology related fields thereby enhancing efficacy and improving organization performance (Kam, Mattson & Goel, 2020).

African countries have worked hard to reflect the spirit behind the development as it is the case of developed countries. Emulating models and concepts of strategic management, organizations within the continent have tried to pull strings the aim at realizing improving performance. Since everything falls and rises on leadership, adaptability of organization leadership that is based on organization-stakeholder relationship has been encouraged in order to promote accountability, transparency and good management of resources across the board (Ahmed-Gamgum, 2014). From a literal angle, it is evident that what has been ailing most of the African organizations in nothing but issues to do with corruption, human resource mismanagement, political compromise, nepotism and excessive controls within the systems hence derailing the growth of organizations to expected standard. In efforts to realize that the tenets of good leadership within organizations are realized for the purposes of improved performance, studies

show that institutional pressure play an imperative role (Gabriel & Nwobodo, 2019).

As a developing nation, Kenya has been faced by both commendable organization growth and questionable trends in performance of some organizations in both private and public sector. Various study scholars in have explored different aspects of institutional pressures based on the institution theory (Gichuke & Okello, 2015). Seeking to establish the influence of institutional pressures on strategy implementation success in public hospitals, Mate (2018) argues that various organization in Kenya face a lot of challenges in effort to implement strategies that are formulated hence affecting the success of strategic goals. However, he establishes that institutional pressures have had a big role in helping public hospitals in Kenya work towards successful implementation of formulated strategies helping to enhance the performance of the hospitals through improved service delivery.

For a very long time in Kenya, service delivery has been a question of who is responsible for what kind of services with fingers within public sector being pointed at one another in the top level management (Thuku & Karanja, 2015). At a point, transitions within the government structures tend to use the promise of the best service delivery as a key concept within the new government of the day but the promises seem to work out very slowly contrary to the expectations in place. State Corporations otherwise known as parastatals in Kenya were formed to meet both commercial and functional goals. Practically, they exists for various reasons including: correcting of market failures, exploiting social and political objectives critical to the development of the nation, provision of education, health matters, redistribution of resources and developing of are that are deemed marginal (Kabiru and Theuri, 2008). A study by Obudo and Wario (2015) established that state corporations in Kenya were under pressure to enhance their efficacy and improve on the aspect of service delivery. Given that service state

corporations are mandated with disseminating various duties to ensure efficacy in matters services, efforts to see changes take place in the public sector has been on fore front (Ibua, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Wilde (2012) carried out a study in selected universities in the United States in order to establish whether coercive, normative and mimetic pressures contributed to the strategies of management in programs. Results indicated Coercive, normative and mimetic pressures together with stakeholders, institutional characteristics and leadership were found to be in play and influence the Masters in Business Administration programs in these institutions. It was however noted that stakeholder interests and power greatly influenced the extent to which these isomorphic mechanisms influenced the programs. In Kenya, Munene (2006) examined forces of isomorphism, which he concluded that they explain best the locations of African Virtual University (AVU) within the traditional university set up. The author cited normative pressures of professionalization as the forces spearheading isomorphism. However, the study by Munene (2006) never touched on strategic responses taken by public universities in Kenya.

Bukura Agricultural College is currently operating as a State Corporation under the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. In the recent past, Bukura agricultural College has faced a number of performance problems including employee turnover, a decrease in the number of graduands, low farm productivity, and a decrease in enrolment and number of job applicants. Management introduced strategic performance to guide attainment of long term goals and mitigate against the said problems in the college. However, many scholars among them Munene (2006) never linked up strategic performance and social pressures. This raised a research gap that necessitated for the study of the effect of Social Pressures on Strategic Performance in Bukura Agricultural College.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College. The study was guided by the following research hypothesis;

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College.

LITERATURE REVIEW;

Institutional theory

A theory is a reasonable statement or group of statements which are supported by evidence meant to explain some phenomena. Institutional theory is a theory on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemes; rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior. Institutional theory concerns the influence of external forces on organizational decision-making. Institutional theory emphasizes the role of social and cultural pressures imposed on organizations that influence organizational practices and structures, Scott (1992). DiMaggio & Powell (1983) stated that managerial decisions are highly influenced by three institutional mechanisms; coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism that develop and diffuse a common set of values, norms, and rules to produce similar practices and structures across organizations that share a common organizational field DiMaggio & Powell (1983).

Institutional arguments originated from the works of Veblen (1898), Commons (1924), Mitchell, Durkheim, Weber and Marx. These different approaches state that organizations do not exist independently, but rather operate in a context of institutional regulations and social processes. The origin of organizational studies stirred interest among sociologists, resulting in an important period of development of institutional theory. Three schools were born, named after American universities: Columbia, Carnegie and Harvard, Scott (1995). The first school was authored by Phillip

known as Columbia school. In his work, Selznick discusses processes within organizations that lead to conformity to rules to the point of interfering with the achievement of organizational goals. According to Selznick, organizations are adaptive organic systems affected by the characteristics of its participants as well as pressures from its environment. Social actions are neither constrained nor shaped by the setting in which they occur. According to Selznick, institutionalization is a process happening to an organization over time as an organization is infused with value beyond the technical requirements at hand Selznick (1957). The organization acquires its distinctive structure, capabilities and liabilities by taking on a distinctive set of values. Merton and Selznick laid the basis for a process model of institutions.

While Merton describes processes of over conformity, Selznick focuses on processes giving rise to a distinctive set of valued commitments. The Harvard school, the second school was led by Talcott Parsons, where he developed his 'cultural institutional' arguments by examining the relation between an organization and its environment. He states that wider normative structures serve to legitimate the existence of organizations, but more specifically, they legitimate the main functional patterns of operations, necessary to implement values. Organizations in different sectors are legitimated by differing values and are governed by differing normative patterns.

Parsons distinguished three vertical levels in organizations: Technical level, concerned with production activities; Managerial, concerned with control and coordination; and institutional, concerned with relating the organization to the norms of the community and society. The third school is the Carnegie school, led by Herbert Simon, which links the limits of individual cognitive capacity with the nature of organizational structure. Organizational structures work to simplify and support decision-making. According to Simon, individuals are expected to adopt organizational value premises as well as rules, procedures and

routines to guide their decisions. This minimizes the discretion of individuals to make fewer choices and is more circumscribed in the choices they do make (Simon & March, 1958).

Neo-institutionalism

Neo-institutional theory was developed during the mid-1970s and it marked the beginning of the second important phase of development in institutional theory. According to both the old and the new institutional theory, an organization's behavior is constrained by institutionalization, but neo-institutionalism gives new sources for this constraint. Neo-institutional theory views institutions as independent variables and it uses a more cognitive and cultural perspective. It also shows more interest in the characteristics of groups of people, which can't be explained from individual behavior (DiMaggio *et al.* 1991 in Louche, 2004). The development of institutional theory led to significant insights regarding the importance of institutional environments to organizational behavior.

Neo-institutional theorists have identified mechanisms, such as norms and regulations, which motivate organizations to respond to institutional pressures in similar ways (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983 in J.D. Goodstein, 1994). Scott, (1987) defines institutions as regulatory structures, governmental agencies, laws, courts, professions, and interest groups while public opinion organizations conform to institutionalized beliefs or practices. Institutional theorists emphasize the survival value and advisability of conforming to the external institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977 in Oliver, 1991). Covalleski and Dirsmith (1988: 563) note that the general theme of the institutional perspective is that the survival of an organization requires that it conforms to social norms of acceptable behavior.

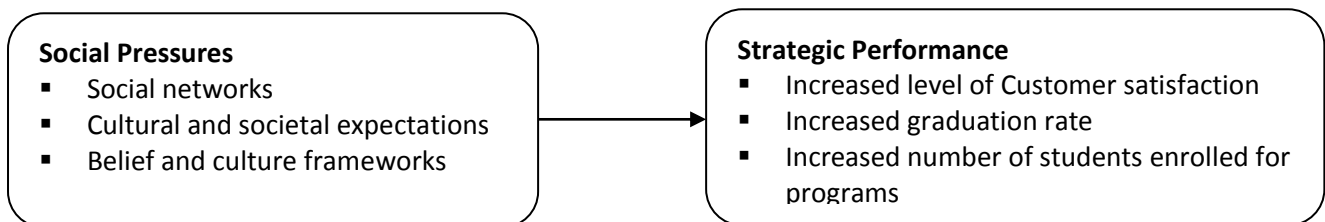
Institutional theory does explain why organizations sometimes adopt a non-choice behavior in the context of taken-for-granted norms and beliefs, through the exercise of habit, convention,

convenience, or social obligation, without any evidence that these behaviors serve the organizations own interests or contribute to organizational efficiency or control (Tolbert, 1985; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1983 in Oliver, 1991). DiMaggio and Powell (1983, 1991) identify three forces driving institutionalization: coercive isomorphism that emanates from political influence and the need for legitimacy; mimetic isomorphism from standard responses to uncertainty, and normative isomorphism related to professionalization.

The three forces can overlap but they tend to thrive in different conditions. Analytically, only coercive isomorphism is linked to the environment surrounding the organizational field. Mimetic and normative processes are internal forces, which help to explain the spread of roles and structures. When organizations are subjected to external coercive scrutiny, evaluation, and regulation, they react

defensively gravitating toward isomorphic transformation. With increased external pressures, organizations are directed to find ways to either diffuse or eliminate this pressure by changing their practices. One of the ways in which they change is by adopting the routines and structures defined by law or government agencies as legitimate. This may minimize conflict and ensure survival.

Institutionalization is closely tied to the idea of organizational field. Fields are a product of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism, and they reflect the slow homogenization and convergence of organizational forms. DiMaggio and Powell contend that fields are constructed and serve as information networks fueling standardization and professionalization. They provide a significant addition to Meyer and Rowan's earlier formulation by spelling out and emphasizing the role of the state in forcing organizations towards isomorphism and con.



Independent Variable

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author

Dependent Variable

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. It is suitable because this study sought to describe the characteristics of the population or phenomenon. The study targeted a population of 150 permanent staff employed at Bukura Agricultural College. The sample size for the study was calculated based on Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the 110 sampled respondents. The researcher administered the questionnaires in person. The pilot study was carried out amongst 11 staff of Bukura Agricultural College. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences

(SPSS) version 21.0 was used for data analysis. The conceptualized regression model for this study was summarized as; $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$

Where;

Y = Dependent variable (Strategic Performance)

β_0 = Constant

X_1 = Social Pressures

β_1 = the Beta coefficients

ε = Error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 94 out of 110 questionnaires given were collected. This gave the study 86% response rate.

According to Smith and Wengland (1993), internal surveys to employees should have a minimum response rate of 30% to 40%. Thus, the response rate in this study was within acceptable range.

Descriptive Analysis for Social Pressures and Strategic Performance

The study sought to investigate the relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College. The descriptive results of perceptions of staff regarding the various types of social pressures at the College are as presented below.

The findings indicate that respondents agreed (mean = 4.44, std dev. = 0.554) that recruitment of employees is competent based. These findings were in line with Karimi *et al.* (2019) study which ascertains that organization performance has a significant relationship with competent employee recruitment. Respondents were also required to indicate whether employees are taken through induction process upon arrival. Respondents were not sure (mean = 3.11, std dev = 1.369) whether new employees are taken through an induction program in the first two weeks or not. Armstrong (2017) views new employee induction as the best opportunity to introduce the organizations philosophy in employees in order to help them meet the strategic goals.

Respondents were also required to rate the level of institutional computerization. Results indicated that

all systems in the institution are not computerized (mean = 2.67, std dev = 1.126). Participants were further undecided (Mean= 3.26, Std dev= 1.075) as to whether trade unions exert pressure of the employer concerning staff issues. Finally, participants agreed (mean = 3.90, std dev = 0.875) that human resource policies offer sufficient protection to staff against discrimination on gender, disability and ethnicity in aspects related to promotion and other privileges. This was in line with Morosan-Danila *et al.* (2013) results which indicated that human resource management should represent all interests of people and defend all the groups of people within an organization.

Descriptive for Strategic Performance

The study sought to find out views of staff regarding strategic performance. Participants agreed (mean=3.99, std dev = 0.831) that there is a high students enrolled for BAC programs. They were undecided (mean = 3.44, std dev = 1.124) as to whether there is a high employee turnover. It was agreed (mean = 4.25, std dev = 0.727), that there is a high level of student satisfaction with training programs at BAC. Finally, participants agreed (mean = 4.36, std dev = 0.589) that there is a high number of graduands from BAC.

Inferential Statistics;

Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix of the study is shown below.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient for key study variables

		Social Pressures	Strategic Performance
Social Pressures	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	94	
Strategic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.468(*)	1
	N	94	94

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings in the table above indicate a positive relationship between social pressures and strategic performance ($r = 0.468$, $p\text{-value} = 0.048$) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a probability of 46.8% that strategic performance can increase with increase in social pressure.

Relationship between Social Pressures and Strategic Performance

The study analyzed if there exists a relationship between social pressures and strategic performance. Results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA: Social Pressures and Strategic Performance

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.945	1	23.945	73.569	.000b
	Residual	76.483	94	.327		
	Total	100.428	100			

- a. Dependent Variable: Strategic Performance
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Pressures

From the ANOVA results in Table 2, the regression model statistically predicted the outcome variable as indicated by $F(1, 23.4) = 73.569$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$

< 0.000 ; thus the model was a good fit for data used for the study.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.487a	.214	.234	.56147

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Pressures

From the model summary results in Table 3, the model (independent variables) explained 21.4% of the sum variation in Strategic Performance in

Bukura Agricultural College as indicated by the $R\text{ square} = 0.214$.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	1.571	.120		13.110	.000
Social Pressures	.345	.036	.487	9.250	.000

- a. Dependent Variable: Strategic Performance

From the results of simple linear regression analysis in Table 4, Social Pressures had a statistically significant contribution in the prediction of strategic performance in Bukura Agricultural College. ($B = 0.345$, $t = 9.250$, $p = 0.000 < 0.000$); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected leading to a conclusion that Social Pressures had a significant influence on strategic performance

$$S = 1.571 + 0.214 SP$$

Where;

S = Strategic Performance

SP = Social Pressures

This showed that a unit change in social pressures brings about a 0.214 unit change in strategic performance in Bukura Agricultural College. Yu, Ramanathan, & Nath (2017), in their study on Integrated and decoupled corporate social performance, explain this relationship by arguing

Below is the model adopted by the study to predict strategic performance based on social pressures.

that, external social pressures can encourage easily decoupled processes for all employees. However, the external social pressures can encourage both easily decoupled and integrated processes for top management. The implication of this finding is explained by Dubey, Gunasekaran, Childe, Papadopoulos, Hazen, Giannakis, & Roubaud (2017) in their recent study on examining the effect of external pressures and organizational culture on shaping performance. They found coercive pressure to have moderation effect on top management behaviors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between Social pressures and strategic performance of service State Corporation in Kenya specifically Bukura Agricultural College. To accomplish this, the objective addressed was; to investigate the relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College, assess the relationship between professional pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College, further,

the study tested the hypothesis ; H_0 : There is no significant relationship between social pressures and strategic performance of Bukura Agricultural College. Social pressures and strategic performance were significantly correlated as they depended on one another. This implied that social pressure exists in the college.

From the results the following conclusions was made; Social Pressures had significant effect on Strategic Management of Bukura Agricultural College.

The following recommendation was made; there is need to sensitize top management officers on social pressures given that they tend to be affected by social pressures compared to the other cadres.

Suggestions for further study

The study suggested that more research should be done on similar variables but using different analysis methods, as well future researchers should consider other organizations in Kenya other than service sector.

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