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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN KENYA: A LITERATURE BASED REVIEW

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Abstract

Background of the study: The construction industry is key to the Kenyan economy, as it provides important products such as buildings and other important infrastructures which assist in growth and development of the country's economy. Construction industry in Kenya is facing stiff competition from companies from abroad especially Chinese companies that are offering construction products cheaply as compared to their counter parts in the industry. Companies in Kenya require to cut their costs for them to compete with the increasing in number of companies. There are new regulations introduced that affect the construction industry, where companies have to register with national construction authority thereby adding cost of operations for the companies among other costs. Therefore, companies need strategize their operations, in order to maintain their employees and cut down their costs to remain competitive in the industry and to satisfy their clients as an end objective.

Objective of the Study: The objective was to review literature on the influence of sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya.

Methodology: The study used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes. A critical review of empirical literature was conducted to determine the sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya. This study provides empirical evidence in support of the notion that a competitive advantage via the implementation of a dynamic capability framework is an important way for the Kenyan construction enterprise to improve its organizational performance.

Results and Findings: The study finds that the construction industry is closely related to the uncertainty in the environment that may affect the performance of a firm. High competition and many other negative aspects in the external environment, which become threats to firms to develop their business that need to be handled carefully through strategic management approach. The implementation of strategic management practices in organizations can help them to enhance their performance through improved effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility.

Keywords: *Sustainable Strategic Management Practices, Performance, Construction Industry Kenya*

1.0 Introduction

Strategic management practices refers to how management performs a continuous appraisal of the business (Barbosa, Castañeda-Ayarza & Ferreira, 2020). It also involves the definition of an organization's strategy. Strategy is seen as a plot of action stating how an organization will attain its long-term objective (Teece, 2019). Strategic management is long-term oriented, focused towards future development potentials, substantial, holistic, and predominantly associated with the highest management level which determines the vision, mission, and culture of the organization. According to Nag, Hambrick and Chen (2017), the field of strategic management deals with (a) the major intended and emergent initiatives (b) taken by general managers on behalf of owners, (c) involving utilization of resources (d) to enhance the performance (e) of the firms (f) in their external environments. Hence, these six elements make up the consensual definition of the strategic management field.

The history of strategy and strategic management covers a broad timeline from ancient Greece to the twenty-first century. Organizations, practitioners, and researchers from every sector of the professional world have focused on strategy as a primary topic at some point (Hill, 2017). As a central component of long-term planning, the development of strategies is integrated into every face of business organizations (Michael, Storey & Thomas, 2017). However, the development of these strategies does not occur instinctively. The development of strategic concepts requires an environment that fosters strategic thinking and focus. However, in contrast to manufacturing organizations that focus on the long-term viability of a product, the construction industry is generally focused on the production of a single and unique end product (Ferreira, Mueller & Papa, 2018). While project-based focus receives significant consideration from construction professionals, less attention is paid to strategic, or enterprise wide, management issues.

The construction industry is one of the key contributors to most economies. The importance of the construction industry to the economy can be measured by its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP); its contribution to investment; and the volume of labor employed. Internationally, the construction industry contribution to GDP is from 3% to 10%; typically lower in developing countries and higher in developed countries (Mafundu & Mafini, 2019).

According to Budiwibowo, Trigunarsyah, Abidin and Soeparto (2019), there are various reasons behind the problem of low profitability and low competitiveness. From an external perspective, the construction industry is believed to be experiencing excessive competition). From an internal perspective, it is reported that many firms have been trapped in the public procurement process which is marked by inefficiency and high cost transactions, collusion, low competitiveness, low profitability and growth, and incompetent human resources. From a financial accounting perspective, companies need to exercise better control over their corporate financial strategies, both in terms of direct and indirect costs. The lack of an appropriate corporate strategy means that sustaining their construction business over the long-term is difficult. As Soeparto *et al*. (2017) note in their recent study that construction players prefer to have a short term benefit than long term sustainability. Moreover, some of the local firms may not be able to survive and sustain their business through the recent global financial meltdown.

1.1 Construction Industry in Kenya

The building and construction sector is one of the important sectors of the Kenyan economy. It is a major contributor to the GDP. In enhancing national, regional, international integration and trade facilitation, the Kenyan government has continued to develop an effective and efficient infrastructure. The development of infrastructure creates sustainable economic growth. The construction industry registered a thriving growth rate of 13.6% in 2019 (KNBS, 2019). According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the formal sector employment grew from 132.9 thousand in 2017, to stand at 148.0 thousand in 2018, a growth of 11.4%. The private sector accounted for majority of these jobs.

The construction industry's economic growth is through backward and forward linkages. This is because construction activities utilize goods and services from other industries. According to the Kenya National Bureau of statistics, Construction industry contributed up to 4.8% to the Kenyan GDP, and employs approximately over one million people. In 2019, the annual basic wages for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers increased by 9.7, 10.1 and 10.5 per cent compared to 8.2, 7.9 and 7.5 per cent, respectively (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

The Kenyan government and the authorities have invested heavily to improve the national infrastructure (Mbusi, 2020). With an increasing population, opportunities seem to be created every new day in building of residential properties, as well as commercial and industrial properties. New opportunities such as prefabricated low-cost housing. Therefore, the construction sector is attracting key investors in the country. Widespread opportunities for investment exists in areas such as; urban renewal, construction of middle and low end houses, improvement of slums and informal settlements and manufacture of building resources and materials (Mbugua, & Winja, 2021). Accordingly, very little or no consideration has been given to strategic management strategies in this sector. Strategic management strategies are yet to effectively implemented in the building and construction companies in Kenya. It is evident that very many construction projects in Kenya are supervised by very qualified individuals, who end up failing due to lack of strategic planning and processes (Nzioka, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The construction industry is key to the Kenyan economy, as it provides important products such as buildings and other important infrastructures which assist in growth and development of the country's economy. The sector provides employment for the people which helps a nation to reduce its unemployment rates, especially in Kenya (Masu & Wanyona, 2020). Many developing nations have come up with policies that have an objective of creating an efficient building and construction industry.

Construction industry in Kenya is facing stiff competition from companies from abroad especially Chinese companies that are offering construction products cheaply as compared to their counter parts in the industry. Companies in Kenya require to cut their costs for them to compete with the increasing in number of companies. Hence affecting the quality of products (Ngugi, Kaluli & Abiero-Gariy, 2017). There are new regulations introduced that affect the construction industry, where companies have to register with national construction authority. Adding cost of operations for the companies among other costs. Therefore, companies need strategize their operations, in order to maintain their employees and cut down their costs to remain competitive in the industry and to satisfy their clients as an end objective (Kog, 2018).

Although strategic management has now become more widely used by many large organizations who are allocating substantial resources to the task, its application to the construction context remains limited. In addition, strategic management studies building on either practical cases or empirical findings related to the Kenyan construction industry are seriously lacking, as well, research endeavors related to these topics in developing countries appears to be limited. Therefore, this study will determine the influence of sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective was to carry out literature review on the influence of sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review: Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies

Porter (1980) developed this theory and the hypothesis that the level of competitiveness within an industry is dictated by a complex interaction of suppliers, customers, substitute products and the threat of new competitors' entry into the market. Companies in a highly competitive environment are forced to find competitive edge to survive. Porter (1985) contends that companies competing in a given industry must fulfil many different activities that form cost and create value for the customers. By using the competitive strategy, a company targets to position itself in a sustainable and profitable position against the forces shaping the industry

Porter (1985) asserts that there are basic businesses strategies – differentiation, cost leadership, and focus – and a company performs best by choosing one strategy on which to concentrate. Many researchers are however of the divergent view that a combination of these strategies may offer a company the best chance to achieve a competitive advantage. Whatever strategy a business chooses, it must fit with the company and its goals and objectives to gain a competitive advantage.

One of Porter's generic strategies is cost leadership (Porter 1985). This strategy focuses on gaining competitive advantage by having the lowest cost in the industry (Pulaj, Kume & Cipi, 2015). In order to achieve a low-cost advantage, an organization must have a low-cost leadership strategy, low-cost manufacturing, and a workforce committed to the low-cost strategy (Wicker, Soebbing, Feiler & Breuer, 2015). The organization must be willing to discontinue any activities in which they do not have a cost advantage and should consider outsourcing activities to other organizations with a cost advantage (). For an effective cost leadership strategy, a firm must have a large market share. Porter (1985) purports only one firm in an industry can be the cost leader and if this is the only difference between a firm and competitors, the best strategic choice is the low cost leadership role (Hlavacka *et al.*, 2001). As a low cost leader, an organization can present barriers against new market entrants who would need large amounts of capital to enter the market (Hyatt, 2001). The leader then is somewhat insulated from industry wide price reductions. The cost leadership strategy does have disadvantages. It creates little customer loyalty and if a firm lowers prices too much, it may lose revenues (Cross, 1999).

Differentiation is also one of Porter's key business strategies (Reilly, 2002). When using this strategy, a company focuses its efforts on providing a unique product or service. Since the product or service is unique, this strategy provides high customer loyalty (Porter, 1985). Product differentiation fulfils a customer need and involves tailoring the product or service to the customer. This allows organizations to charge a premium price to capture market share. Aaker (1984) further argues that a differentiation strategy is often but not always associated with a higher price because it usually examines the appropriateness of different strategies of the business more indirectly by considering whether they are responsive to the external surrounding and the mission and long term goals.

For focus strategies, the firm chooses a specific segment or group of segments in the industry. A firm that does not have an overall competitive advantage optimizes its strategy in order to serve the needs of the target segments and achieve a competitive advantage in them. Cost focus and differentiation focus rely on the differences of the given segment from the other segments in the industry, that is, differences in cost behaviour or the unique needs of a segment. It means tailoring the activities to a specific segment exclusively which is not served properly by broadly targeted competitors. However, sometimes firms choose to create separate business units under the same corporate entity (Porter, 1985).

Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies theory depicts how an organization seeks after upper hand over its picked market scope. Organizations in a highly competitive environment are forced to find competitive edge to survive. Construction companies competing in the sector must fulfil many different activities that form cost and create value for the students. By using the competitive strategy, construction companies target to position themselves in a sustainable and profitable position against the forces shaping the sector.

2.2 Empirical Review

Ogeto (2020) examined the strategic management practices and organizational performance in the construction industry in Kenya with a case study of allied plumbers limited. Descriptive research design was used, with stratified sampling procedure used in selecting sample from target population of Allied Plumbers limited employees drawn various departments. The study used structured questionnaire to collect data. Findings, revealed that management of Allied plumbers limited have in place requisite strategic infrastructure management systems that have enhanced its performance in construction industry, and further found out that the organization does not fully embrace strategic human resource management that is employee engagement, training and development, talent management and succession planning. The study recommended that organization need to improve on facility planning and management, and acquire sustainable human resource management policy to ensure employees acquire specific knowledge and skills in their current and future roles with greater focus on growth for them to be competitive in the construction industry.

Velani (2018) investigated the influence of strategic management strategies on performance of construction companies in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objective of the study was to evaluate the influence of cost leadership strategies, differentiation strategies and focus strategies on organizational performance of construction companies in Nairobi County. The research design was descriptive in nature. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation, with the help of SPSS Software as an analytical tool. There was positive relation between cost leadership, differentiation strategy and focus strategy. The organizational performance was positively correlated with all the independent variables. The highest correlation was with cost leadership strategy with coefficient of 0.452, second was differentiation strategy with coefficient of 0.381 and third was focus strategy with coefficient of 0.280. The findings were all positively correlated though they were not significant. The study concluded that cost leadership contributes the most to the organizational performance and greater advantage is achieved if construction firms combine the generic strategies as opposed to achieving pure strategies.

Kwamensa (2016) on strategic interventions on performance of Construction companies in Kenya, found out that strategic leadership involves the ability to anticipate, envision, and maintain flexibility and to empower others to create strategic change as necessary. Strategic leadership is widely described as one of the key drivers of effective strategy implementation. However, lack of leadership, and specifically strategic leadership by the top management of the organization, has been identified as one of the major barriers to effective strategy implementation. Further, the study noted that several identifiable actions characterize strategic leadership that positively contributes to effective strategy implementation include; determining strategic direction, establishing balanced organizational controls, effectively managing the organizations resource portfolio, sustaining an effective organizational culture and emphasizing ethical practices.

Bakar, Tufail, Yusof and Virgiyanti (2019) on the implementation of strategic management practices in the Malaysian construction industry ascertain that strategic management practice can improve efficiency and most firms practicing strategic management have a clear objective, a winning strategy to achieve the objectives. The study suggests the strategic human resource development is one of the strategic management practices that contributed to organizational performance. Human resource development practices like employee coaching, training, mentorship and delegation of duties contributed to improved productivity of the organization. There is a relationship between employee skills and performance among organizations. By extension, the study observed that employee training entails a set of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace

Wambugu and Waiganjo (2015) on the effects of strategic management practices on organizational performance of construction companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya concluded that high quality service is vital in order to offer strategic customer relationship, enables growth of market share, and improves productivity of the construction companies. The study also concluded that technical skills development improved the productivity of employees, promotes innovation and efficiency in the construction companies. The study established that customer relationship management enables construction companies to work in a competitive environment, and to supersede competitor efforts.

Chinowsky and Meredith (2018) and Betts, Clark, and Ofori (2019) noted that strategic management application to the construction context remains limited and lags behind that in other industries. Cheah and Garvin (2014) found that operational strategy has dominated strategic management research in the construction industry. Indeed, strategic management capabilities are being broadly developed by many large construction firms, however, there are considerable limitations which need to be addressed. After identifying all eight schools of thoughts in business management, Huovinen (2017) concluded that there is no established tradition in construction-related business management research. Ngowi, Iwisi and Mushi (2018) found that Botswana construction firms could not acquire large quantities of resources and capabilities that enabled them to create and sustain a competitive advantage. Cheah and Garvin (2014) developed an open framework for corporate strategy in construction, and lay out seven strategic fields and two internal mechanisms in corporate strategy. Huovinen (2017) argues that a firm's competence has played a key role as a part of the generic and construction-related business-management concepts in the last decade.

Yates (2017) addresses the changing nature of construction industry competition such as barriers to competitiveness, nationalism issues, and external influences on competition. He argues that although there are always new ways to compete against local firms, it requires more knowledge about local conditions, cultures, and politics, thus organizational transformation is the most effective strategy to adopt for the next century. Construction enterprises should transform their organizations from their native country's way and move them toward the forefront of domestic and global business arenas at the close of the twentieth century (Yates, 2017). Price and Newson

(2019) believe that for many construction enterprises, success in the future will depend upon on transformational strategies.

Mungeria (2017) which focused on professional teamwork and project performance in the construction industry in Kenya. The purpose of this study was to establish the factors leading to effective team work management of professional firms in the building construction industry in Kenya, to determine the extent to which teamwork management of professional firms has been employed in the construction industry in Kenya; to evaluate the relationship between teamwork management of professional firms in the construction industry and successful completion of construction projects in Kenya and to establish the challenges facing the teamwork management of professional firms in the construction industry in Kenya. The findings revealed that effective teamwork is determined by good team leadership, project atmosphere, project members and project management strategies.

Kamuiru (2013) shed light on the Elements of Project Management applied by Home Builders in the Construction of Single Family House; A Case of Ngoingwa Estate- Kiambu County. The study placed emphasis on the project management techniques and methods in the construction of a family houses by the contractors. The finding of the study exposed that once the contract is awarded, the first action plan the home builder did was to search for material suppliers and to seek for the second opinions of what needed to be done before commencement of the work. The researcher recommended that project management methodologies be applied and implemented within the context of building and construction of family housing which would improve the performance and increase the productivity of contractors.

Munyoki (2014) study explored how project financing and supervision of construction works influence completion of construction project which is termed as discharge of contract by performance. The study found out that project financing (resource) is the heart of a successful project completion, financial issues being timely release of funds, stability of the local currency, cash flow, change in price of materials, access to lending institutions. The study also identified contractors' experience and competence plays key role in supervising and ensuring projects are completed successfully as good supervision will oversee best resource management and manpower deployment, conformance to quality requirements timely deliveries and clear understanding by staff of the expected outcomes.

Kalia (2012) delved in establishing the competitive strategies employed by Chinese companies in Kenya. The study found out that Chinese firms in building and construction in Kenya have adopted cost leadership strategy for competing against themselves, and they had also embraced differentiation strategy in their operations. The study further found out that Chinese firms in building and construction industry in Kenya used cost leadership strategy as a competitive strategy since they attempt to reduce their operational costs in order to deliver the product at the lowest prices possible. It was also found out those Chinese firms in building and construction industry in Kenya use differentiation as a competitive strategy since they invest much in product research and strive to deliver high quality products. Chinese firms in building and construction industry in

Kenya also used focus as a competitive strategy since they have products for different types of consumers.

According to Solomon and Barrack (2015), the building and construction industry is unable to satisfy its clients time and again. This causes a major issue and concern for the whole of the sector. Therefore, to overcome these issues, firms need to adopt new strategies and approaches to augment the efficiency and client satisfaction. Davenport and Smith (2005), scrutinized the involvement of all types of procurement and relative level of client satisfaction. Whereby they concluded, satisfying a private client was much harder than satisfying a public client. They also stated that the success rate of the building and construction industry was highly dependent on how the firm used its resources and how they planned for them. It is extremely important to examine the strategic management strategies used by organizations in building and construction industry in Kenya, which is one of the most booming and promising sectors in the country. This is because construction project are very costly and are more so when the project is stalled for a period of time.

There are two main reasons behind the problem of low profitability and low competitiveness: the environment that they faced is not favorable, and the other is the lack of strategic direction to improve their competitiveness and performance. Betts and Ofori (2019) suggest that in developing countries, the large construction firms will need to undertake strategic management and process analysis if they are to survive the expected onslaught of foreign construction enterprises following the adoption of free-market economic policies by most governments. Small companies will also require a longer-term perspective if they are to survive factors such as downward 'plundering' by larger firms, continual change in public sector development budgets, rising client aspirations, and changing industry practices. McClintock (2016) affirms that construction industry specific standards should be used as key parameters that can promote project performance as important tools and techniques which are useful in quality planning, assurance and control respectively.

Ghara (2016) study focused on best practices in quality control and assurance in design echoed that if proper designs are created which are within the expected quality standards and which take into consideration the geographical topography, it will be difficult to have alarming cases of buildings collapsing in the modern world owing to improved technology that is in place. The author noted that in order for projects to be undertaken in construction of buildings, it is required that designs have to be presented to the relevant authorities for appraisal and approval before they are implemented. The purpose of approving plans and designs is to ensure that housing projects follow specific quality standards and in accordance with the specific topography in which they will be constructed the design has proposed measures to enhance standardized buildings.

Oje, Odusami and Ogunsemi (2010) studied the impact of contractors' financial management capability on cost and time performance of construction projects. The study's methodology employed prequalification assessments of management capability of wining contractors as well as cost data relating to 77 completed building projects executed between 2004 and 2007 were obtained. The data obtained from a questionnaire and archival data were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance and multiple regression. The results revealed that contractors' financial management capability has significant impact on cost and time performance of building projects as evidenced by *p*-values of 0.042 and 0.039, respectively.

Raji and Firas (2019) suggested that quality planning and control should be the most critical parameter that project managers should consider especially in construction projects. In their study on implementation of quality management concepts in managing engineering project sites", the authors state that Quality Management should be the guideline towards meeting the owner's requirements or compliance with the set standards and specifications. The authors employed a descriptive research design in surveying 20 construction companies in Jordan. The main recommendations and conclusions made by these authors is that construction companies should employ quality planning as a competitive strategy towards ensuring that they are associated with high quality projects in order to get more referrals in their business engagement. The study's main limitation is based on the fact that it focused on total quality management (TQM) as the only indicator that should be considered, without incorporating other elements of ensuring safety housing. Further, the study's focus was also on the basis of competitiveness as opposed to reducing high rates of collapsing houses in urban centers respectively.

3.0 Methodology

The study reviewed literature on influence of sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya. The study used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes. A critical review of empirical literature was conducted to determine the sustainable strategic management practices on the performance of construction industry in Kenya.

4.0 Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence in support of the notion that a competitive advantage via the implementation of a dynamic capability framework is an important way for the Kenyan construction enterprise to improve its organizational performance. If a dynamic capabilities framework can work in the context of Kenyan, it suggests that the framework has potential applicability in performance. The value and rarity characteristics of asset-capability combinations contribute to the competitive advantage of the Kenyan construction enterprises, and that such an advantage, sequentially contribute to its organizational performance. As most valuable capabilities inside the firms are intangible assets and hence non-tradable, such processes of building loyalty and commitments, and knowledge management were found to be the most influential processes enabling the Kenyan construction firms to effectively reduce costs, exploit market opportunities, and/or neutralize competitive threats.

The literature indicates that most of large construction companies are practicing strategic management in one way or the other and majority of these companies have clear objectives, winning strategies to achieve the objectives and a sound mission statement to pilot the organization towards success. Most of construction companies claims to have some form of written planning system that is mostly formulated by the managing director without the involvement of other employees. The study also found that most construction companies in are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their firms which instigate by management skills, organization structure, client relationship, image and reputation and profit.

The study also found that the large construction companies that implemented written planning system gained higher performance, which further consolidates the fact that strategic management, is crucial in order to succeed. Even though construction companies that do not practice strategic management are a minority, but these companies generate a lower performance and receive limited contractual works annually. Thus, firms should focus more on efficient organization structure to be competitive in the challenging environment.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The construction industry is closely related to the uncertainty in the environment that may affect the performance of a firm. High competition and many other negative aspects in the external environment, which become threats to firms to develop their business that need to be handled carefully through strategic management approach. The implementation of strategic management practices in organizations can help them to enhance their performance through improved effectiveness, efficiency and flexibility.

In order to improve the performance, the implementation of strategic management shall be conducted properly. It shall analyze the external environment to obtain information in term of threats and opportunities, and carry out the internal environment assessment to evaluate the firm’s strengths and weaknesses in order to cope with the threats and opportunities.

In view of the findings, the study recommends that management should show more commitment to the firms. The managers need to spend more of their time planning and implementing strategy, the management of the quantity surveying firms need to allocate more resources and provide training to the staff and seek employee input during the process of strategy formulation and implementation.

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