FULL-LENGTH ARTICLE

The Strategic Leadership Practices in Public Higher Education Institutions of Ethiopia: Evidences from Jimma University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to describe the strategic leadership practices in public higher education institutions of Ethiopia, evidences being from Jimma University. A concurrent mixed methods research design was employed. Departments, colleges and instructors were randomly selected whereas academic leaders were purposely included. Questionnaire, semi -structured interview and document review were used to gather data. Frequency counts, percentages and chi square tests were used for the data analysis. Based on the analysis, it was found that the vision, mission and strategies were not well communicated and shared, core values were not well internalized and reflected in the day-to-day activities of employees; strategies were not periodically reviewed. Moreover, it was found that there was weak participation of employees in the formulation of the strategic plan. Furthermore, lack of commitment, ineffective communication, inadequate human and financial resources and absence of accountability were found to be the major challenges to the strategic leadership practices. From the findings, it could be concluded that common understanding and a feeling of ownership were not sufficiently created regarding the vision, mission, goals and strategies of the university with its implication on the effectiveness of strategic leadership practice. Therefore, Jimma University is advised to organize series of workshops and trainings at different levels (to create adequate awareness, consensus and improve employees commitment); conduct continuous monitoring, periodic evaluation and develop clear feedback system; and the leadership pay adequate attention in ensuring the effectiveness of strategic leadership and the provision of adequate resource to support strategic leadership practice.

Key words: Core value; mission; strategic goals; strategic leadership; vision

INTRODUCTION

Organizations, nowadays, operate in a very complex, competitive, dynamic and challenging environment. This, according to Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2011) demands organizations not only strategic leadership but also aligning resources to effectively compete and achieve strategic goals to survive and grow. Strategic leadership, Row (2001) writes, is crucial to survive in a competitive environment. As Row (2001) adds, without effective strategic leadership, the capacity of an organization to sustain a competitive advantage is greatly affected. Serfontein (2009) also states the importance of a strong strategic leadership team and clear strategy for organizations to succeed in today's hostile environment. Thus, organizations need not only continuously improve their existing

practices but also innovate to cope with the challenges contemporary competitive environment. According to Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2007, p.375), strategic leadership entails "the ability to anticipate events, envision possibilities, maintain flexibility and empower others to create strategic change". Effective strategic leadership, thus, calls for determining the organization's strategic direction, exploiting and maintaining core competencies, managing human as well as social capital, sustaining an effective organizational culture, emphasizing ethical practices and establishing balanced organizational controls that help organizations effectively achieve intended goals.

Like other organizations, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate in a very dynamic and competitive environment. HEIs provide educated and skilled human power that plays significant role in the development of the national economy. Yet, skills and knowledge needed for the economy continuously changes. This, thus, demands HEIs to have strategic leaders. In supporting this, Fulmer, Gibbs, and Goldsmith (2000) underscore the importance of developing strategic leaders capable of handling complexity, engaging people in vision, partnering effectively and leading through change as a strategic necessity for today's HEIs. It is believed that strategic leaders have the capacity to set directions and identify, choose and implement activities that create compatibility between internal organizational strengths and the changing external environment within which the HEIs operate (Holt & Palmer, 2008). Holt and Palmer (2008) add that the critical element of organizational success is having a top leadership team with superior leadership skills and the potential to strategically lead the organization in the intended direction. Leaders at the top level often use their discretion when making strategic decisions. Strategic leaders' decisions help organizations gain a competitive advantage and how managers exercise discretion when determining appropriate strategic actions is critical to the organization's success (Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000).

According to Fulmer, Gibbs, and Goldsmith (2000), strategic leaders play a critical role in organizations. They develop the organization's strategic direction which specifies the image and character the organization needs to develop over time. While formulating strategic direction, strategic leaders evaluate internal and external conditions their organization could face over in the future. Strategic leaders, hence, must ensure their organization exploits its core competencies which could be used to produce and deliver products or services that create value for customers. Strategic leaders, as Rainey (2010) writes, encourage employees to follow their own ideas and use reward and incentive systems to encourage productive employees to perform much better. Moreover, they create vision for the future and work to translate the vision into reality through strategic direction. Furthermore, they not only provide the big picture perspective or mental model of the future but also make the strategic direction understandable and desirable, Strategic leaders are able to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align and learn that help them achieve their strategic vision (Shoemaker, et al., 2012).

Strategic leadership was recently recognized as one of the key drivers of effective strategy implementation (Yukl, 2010). Yukl (2010) indicates early leadership researchers majorly focused on what lower-level managers did or should do in their attempts to guidance, support and give feedback to subordinates. In supporting this, Elenkov (2008) reveals that there has been little empirical evidence regarding the effects of strategic level leadership on organizational processes. Over the past few years, however, attention has been given to the importance of studying strategic leadership. For instance, Serfontein (2009) assessed the impact of strategic leadership on the operational strategy and performance of business organizations in South Africa. Likewise, Jooste and Fourie (2009) studied the role of strategic leadership in effective strategy implementation. Thus, the need for strategic leadership continues to be a major concern for contemporary organizations. Effective strategic leadership helps organizations align their strategies, employees and key processes to enhance their performance and, eventually, bring about stakeholder and employee satisfaction (Serfontein, 2009). Similarly, Hitt & Ireland (1999) emphasize the necessity of effective strategic leadership for organizational performance. Without effective strategic leadership, the probability of an organization achieving even satisfactory performance in a competitive environment would be reduced (Rowe, 2001). Despite such importance, however, lack of strategic leadership is not only one of the major barriers to effective strategy implementation but also is among the key challenges that contemporary organizations (Rowe, 2001; Kaplan & Norton, 2004).

Higher education institutions, like other organizations, have been, are and will continue to work in a very competitive environment. The competitive environment demands top level leaders to strategically lead their organizations to survive and grow. It requires leaders to formulate strategic direction and collaborate with stakeholders to meet their strategic expectations.

As could be understood from the discussions thus far, HEIs face various challenges in their move towards their strategic directions. Hence, as Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith (2000) suggest, there is a need for strategic leaders capable of handling complexity, engaging people in vision, partnering effectively and leading through change as a strategic necessity for today's universities. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical studies regarding the practice of strategic leadership in the Ethiopian HEIs. The practices of strategic leadership, i.e., how HEIs set vision, formulate and implement strategies and align resources to achieve strategic goals needs empirical study. Accordingly, this study attempted to assess the strategic leadership practice at Jimma University, Ethiopia with the following guiding research questions:

- How does Jimma University top level leadership determine strategic direction & set vision?
- To what extent do stakeholders involve in the strategic plan development and its implementation of the university?
- How effectively are strategies, goals, missions & vision of the university communicated to employees of the university?
- What are the challenges of effective strategic leadership practice of Jimma University?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Mixed methods research design was used in this study as it not only helps in gathering data from multiple sources by using multiple strategies but also ensures the strengths of both methods by minimizing their weaknesses (Wiersma et al., 2009). Specifically, concurrent mixed methods research was employed because it enables to assess and describe the current practices and challenges of the issue under consideration in a broad and wider magnitude (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from both primary and secondary data sources. The use of multiple sources of data and research methods is important to explore research problems from different angles (Cohen and Manion, 1994). It enables the generation of rich data and is believed to enhance the validity of the study. Primary data were collected from instructors and academic leaders at different levels whereas secondary data were gathered from such documents as strategic plan documents, minutes, implementations reports, etc.

Simple random sampling technique, specifically the lottery method, was used to select 3 sample colleges and 15 departments. Proportional sampling allocation was to include 52 (30%) instructors from the sample departments which were followed by lottery method to select respondents from each sample department. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 31 sample academic leaders at different levels of responsibility.

Questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document review were used to gather the data. Questionnaires were employed to collect the data from instructors and academic leaders whereas semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data from academic leaders. Semi-structured interview was used its advantage of flexibility, to gather detailed data in the respondents' own words, to allow respondents to discuss their opinions, views and experiences in detail, help the researchers clarify unclear issues and search specific information related to the problem (Merriam, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Relevant documents such as strategic plan document, implementation reports, etc. were also reviewed to substantiate the data. Data collected through close-ended items were presented in table form and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Chi-square test was used to see whether there was statistically significant difference between the responses of instructors and academic leaders at 0.05. Qualitative data generated through open-ended items, semi-interviews and document reviews were analyzed and used to substantiate the quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section begins with the description of the respondents' background information followed by the analysis of the main data collected pertaining to the strategic leadership practice of the Jimma University. Eighty three questionnaires were distributed of which 68 (82%) returned.

Table 1. Respondents' background information

Characteristic	Alternatives	Respondents					
		Academic Leaders (N=24)		Instructors (N=44)		Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1. Sex	M	22	91.7	38	86.4	60	88.2
	F	2	8.3	6	13.6	8	11.8
2. Age	20-25	-	-	2	4.5	2	2.9
	26-30	2	8.5	8	18.2	10	14.7
	31-35	9	37.5	12	27.3	21	30.9
	36-40	8	33.3	7	15.9	15	22.1
	>40	5	20.8	15	34.1	20	29.4
3. Educational Background	First Degree	1	4.2	4	9.1	5	7.4
	MA/MSC	19	79.2	40	90.9	59	86.8
	PhD	4	16.7	-	-	4	5.9
4. Academic rank	Grad. Assistant	-	-	1	2.3	1	1.5
	Lecture	15	62.5	39	88.6	54	79.4
	Ass. Prof	8	33.3	4	9.1	12	17.6
	Associate Prof	1	4.2	-	-	1	1.5
5. Work experience	< 5	2	8.3	11	25	13	19.1
	5-10	12	50	13	29.5	25	36.8
	11-15	2	8.3	10	22.7	12	17.6
	16-20	3	12.5	7	15.9	10	14.7
	>20	5	20.8	3	6.8	8	11.8

As can be seen from the responses to Item 1 of Table 1, 22 (91.7%) academic leaders and 38 (86.4%) instructors were male which shows the less in number of female instructors and office holders in the university. Responses to   Item 2 of Table 1 indicates that all [24 (100%)] academic leaders and 42 (95.5%) instructors were above 26 years of age implying that the respondents are sufficiently mature to understand and provide relevant information related to strategic leadership practice of the university. Responses to Item 3 of Table 1 revealed that 19 (79.2%) academic leaders and 40 (90.9%) instructors hold second degrees whereas 4 (16.7%) academic leaders had a third degree. The data showed that a greater proportion of respondents had the required qualifications to analyze the leadership situation and provide relevant and genuine data. As responses to Item 4 of Table 1 show, the majority [54 (79.4%)] of the respondents had a lecturer rank while 12 (17.6) and 1 (1.5%) were assistant and associate professors respectively. Responses to Item 5 of Table 2 which relates to work experiences of respondents showed that the majority [55, 80.9%)] of respondents had more than five years of experience working in the university which implies that respondents had adequate experiences of teaching and management in the university and could provide relevant information pertaining to strategic leadership practice of the university.

Table 2. Vision and Mission Statements

Vision/ Mission	Items	Responses (Yes)						X ^{2}	Sign. (2 tailed)
		Academic Leaders			Instructors				
		Yes		T	Yes		T		
		N	%		N	%			
Vision									
1.	The university has written a vision statement.	24	100	24	44	100	44		
2.	The vision statement is clear and inspires employees by giving strategic direction	22	91.7	24	25	43.2	44	8.835	.003*
3.	Reflects the core ideology/philosophy of the organization	24	100	24	41	93.2	44	1.712	.191
4.	Appears realistic and attainable	21	87.5	24	24	55.8	43	7.012	.008
5.	Understood by all employees	8	44.4	18	9	20.9	43	3.490	.062
Mission									
6.	The university has written mission statement.	24	100	24	44	100	44		
7.	The mission defines the organization's purpose	23	95.8	24	36	85.7	42	1.649	.199
8.	Gives clear focus and priorities for organizational strategies and activities	21	87.5	24	26	61.9	42	4.881	.027
9.	Relevant for organizational goal, value and external environment	23	95.8	24	37	84.1	44	2.063	.151
10.	Communicated to all employees	10	47.6	21	8	19.0	42	5.600	.018

Table 2 deals with the vision and mission statements of the university. It is clear that vision guides organizations in the right direction. It provides a compelling goal that aligns the behavior, actions and contributions of employees across all levels and functions of the organization. With regard to vision, the respondents were asked whether the university had written vision. Accordingly, all [68 (100%)] respondents replied that the university had written vision statements. While responding to whether the vision of the university is clear and inspiring and gives direction, the majority [(22, 91.7%)] of academic leaders replied that the vision is clear and inspiring. Similarly, less than half [25 (43.2%)] of instructors were agreed with the idea of academic leaders that the vision is clear and inspiring. The chi square result of .003 at the 0.05 level of significance also indicated that there is a statistically significant opinion difference between academic leaders and instructors. Although the academic leaders replied that the vision of the university is clear and inspiring the interview conducted with deans shows that the vision of the university is vague for most employees and cannot inspire them. They further stated that some employees did not even know exactly the vision of the university and how it could be achieved. According to their response, instructors do not demonstrate a commitment to achieve the goals, voluntarily take an extra responsibility and take initiatives to meet existing or new challenges and implement changes. This shows that the vision of the university might have not been internalized by employees and inspires them to draw their commitment and guide their effort to realize the vision.

While responding to Item 3 of Table 2, i.e., whether the vision reflects the core philosophy of the organization or not, all [24 (100%)] academic leaders and 41 (93.2%) instructors replied that the vision reflects the core philosophy of their organization the implication being the reflection of the

university's core philosophy in its core in its vision which, in turn, implies the provision of quality and research-based problem-solving education to society and become one of the leading universities in the country. With   Item 4 of Table 2, respondents were asked whether the Jimma University's vision appears realistic and attainable. In their responses, consequently, the majority [o21 (87.5)] of academic leaders and 24 (55.8%) of instructors responded that the vision seems realistic and could be achieved in the future. This is likely because respondents were influenced by the past performance of the university, which ranked first for four consecutive years from among the public universities in Ethiopia. Vision needs to be shared and well understood among employees of the organization to build trust, collaboration, interdependence and mutual responsibilities and to align the actions and efforts of people across the whole organization, which enables the organization to succeed in a competitive environment. In their response to Item 5 of Table 2, less than half [8 (44.4%)] of academic leaders and 9 (20.9%) of the instructors replied that the vision of the university is understood by all employees. The interview results also showed that the vision of the university was not effectively communicated and shared among employees of the organization. This implies that the vision of the university may not attract the attention of employees and energize them to enhance their commitment and direct their effort for its realization.

Organizational mission is a written expression of the purpose of an organization. It expresses the reason the organization exists or is established for. It provides guidance, consistency and meaning to decisions and activities at all levels of the organization. With Item 6 of Table 2, the respondents were asked whether the university had written mission statements to which all [68 (100%)] replied that the university has mission statements. Respondents were further asked whether the mission statement defines the purpose of the organization. Accordingly, while responding to Item 7 of Table 2, the majority [23 (95.8%)] of academic leaders and 36 (85.7%) instructors revealed that the mission statement of the university defines the purpose of the university. This, thus, shows that the mission statement of the university helps employees get focused pertaining to the accomplishment of long-term objectives. It also helps guide employees in planning, developing strategies and improving partnerships with others that help them achieve their mission.

The respondents, in their response to Item 8 of Table 2, 21 (87.5%) academic leaders and 26 (61.9%) instructors expressed that the mission statement of the university gives clear focus and priorities for organizational strategies and activities. This, thus, indicates that having a clear mission statement that focuses on priorities facilitates strategic thinking that helps the university address the strategic needs of stakeholders. With regard to Item 9 of Table 3, i.e., whether the mission is relevant to the organizational goals, values, and external environment, majority [23 (95.8%)] of the academic leaders and 37 (84.1%) of instructors confirmed the relevance of mission statement of the university for goals, values and the external environment. Having a relevant mission statement helps the organization compete in a dynamic environment by enhancing the commitment of internal and external stakeholders for the achievement of long-term goals. It also gives the university the ability to mobilize resources and efforts of stakeholders and work through a competent and committed workforce. This enables the university to address stakeholders' needs and priorities and facilitates the achievement of its mission and realization of its vision.

Item 10 of Table 2 relates to whether or not the mission of the university was communicated to all employees. While responding to this item, nearly less than half [10 (47.6%)] of the academic leaders and 8 (19%) instructors responded the mission statement was communicated to all employees. This implies that significant majority of employees might not have a shared understanding and meaning of the mission statement of the university. This may negatively affect the university to align the resources and efforts of the organization towards the achievement of strategic goals, mission and realization of the vision of the university.

Table 3. Value Statement

Items	Academic Leaders Yes			Instructors Yes			X^2	Sign. (2 tailed)
	N	%	T	N	%	T		
1. The university has written value statement?	18	78.3	23	35	79.5	44	.015	.902
2. The university's value statements define the university's values and ethical principles	16	72.7	22	29	69.0	42	.094	.760
3. Employees internalized and frequently cite the values of the university	11	45.0	24	10	25.6	39	3.697	.055
4. The values reflected in the conducts (behavior, attitude) of employees	9	39.1	23	15	37.5	40	1.677	.195
5. The values are shared by all employees of the university.	9	42.9	21	6	14.0	43	6.569	.010

Table 3 deals with the value statement of the Jimma University. A statement of value is a written document that defines the ethical principles of an organization. Organizational values are the beliefs and ethical principles that underlie an organizational mission. Values give meaning to an organization's work and form the basis of employees' commitment. The respondents, therefore, were asked whether the Jimma University had written value. Consequently, majority [18 (78.3%)] of academic leaders and 35 (79.5%) instructors indicated that the university has clear statements of values. In support in this, a review of the university's strategic plan document revealed clearly statements core value of the university. According to the document, excellence and quality in teaching, research and service; diversity, tolerance and inclusiveness in the ethnicity, religion, culture and gender; equity and access in teaching, research and community services; gender sensitivity to rectify the prevailing gender inequity and imbalance; honesty and integrity in carrying out intellectual endeavors; transparency and accountability in decision making; community involvement and empowerment; networking for collaboration and partnership; mutual respect, collegiality and team spirit in transforming the university are the core values of the university that are stated in the document and need to be reflected by each employee of the university to direct their day-to-day activities.

Item 2 of Table 3 has to do with whether the value statements define the university's value and ethical principles. Accordingly, majority, [16 (72.7%)] of academic leaders and 29 (69%) of instructors reacted that value statement reflect what is the Jimma University values and ethical principles to guide the behavior and actions its employees. Despite this, the interview result showed that employees of the university did not effectively reflect the values which might imply that they are not committed to and obeying and implementing the ethical principles to guide their day-to-day behavior and action. This, might, in turn, imply that there could be unethical practice that might affect the strategic leadership practice of the university.

In their response to Item 3 of Table 3, less than half, i.e., 11 (45%) academic leaders and 10 (25%) of instructors replied that employees of the university internalized and frequently cite the values of the university. This shows that the values of the university may not guide the employees' day-to-day behavior and action. The interview conducted with deans also confirmed that the majority of the employees of their respective college did not internalize the values and fail to reflect in their day-to-day work. The respondents were also asked if values are reflected in the conduct of employees. In their responses to Item 4 of Table 3, only 9 (39.1%) academic leaders and 15 (37.5%) instructors agreed with the reflection the university's values in the conduct of employees. This indicates that the values of the organization may not serve as ethical principles that guide the behavior and action of employees. This implies that the majority of employees of the university are not committed to practicing the ethical values of the university which may affect the reputation and performance of the university. This demands that top executives and managers at different levels of the university work more in creating and monitoring a good work culture that values good ethical practices that govern the day-to-day activities of employees. As seen from responses to Item 5 of Table 3, only 9 (42.9%) academic leaders and 6 (14%) instructors pointed out that the values of the university are shared among all employees. This indicates that the values of the university were not clearly communicated and understood by all employees of the university. This implies that employees of the university do not share common values that enable them to ethically behave in making decisions and implementing strategies that might enhance the achievement of the strategic goals, mission and vision of the university.

A strategic plan is a road map that leads an organization from where it is now to where it would like to be in the future. It helps determine key priorities that are important in the long term for the organization. It also leads to the development of plans that will enable the organization to realize its ideal picture. Table 4 presents the strategic planning process of the university.

Table 4. Strategic Plan Formulation

Items	Responses(Yes)						X^2	Sign. (2 tailed)
	Academic Leaders			Instructors				
	Yes			Yes				
	N	%	T	**N**	**%**	T		
1. The university has strategic plan document.		100	24	44	100	44		
2. The strategic plan includes organizational vision, mission, values, goals and strategies	22	91.7	24	43	97.7	44	1.353	.245
3. The goals in the strategic plan document are consistent with the organizational mission	22	91.7	24	35	87.5	40	.267	.605
4. The strategic plan shows logical link between activities and goals	21	87.5	24	24	63.2	38	4.380	.036
5. The strategic plan document is accessible to all employees	19	86.3	22	26	60.5	43	1.795	.180
6. Employees at all level participated in the strategic plan development.	6	28.6	21	7	15.9	44	1.425	.233

As responses to Item 1 of Table of 4 indicate, all (100%) respondents replied that the university had well developed strategic plan document which was also ascertained by the document review. Item 2 of Table 4 relates to whether or not the strategic plan has vision, mission, values, goals and strategies to which majority, [22 (91.7%)] of the academic leaders and 43 (97.7%) instructors, responded as having complete strategic plan elements which implies clearly identified priorities, opportunities and threats. Item 3 of Table 4 relates to consistency of goals with the organizational mission. In their response to this item, majority [22, 91.7%)] of the academic leaders and 35(87.5%) instructors replied that the goals set in the strategic plan were consistent with the mission of the university. This implies that the strategic goals are relevant to address the future demand of the stakeholders and enable the university to obtain their commitment to achieve the goals that ultimately enable the university to achieve its mission. Respondents were further asked whether the strategic plan shows a logical link between activities and goals. Consequently, the responses of majority of 21 (87.5%) the academic leaders and 24 (63.2%) instructors revealed that there is a logical link between the activities and goals. This, thus, gives leaders an opportunity to align their resources and efforts and obtain commitment to achieve the intended goals of the university.

With regard to the extent to which the strategic plan document is accessible to all employees varying responses were obtained. That is, majority [19 (86.3%)] of the academic leaders and 26 (60.5%) instructors expressed the accessibility of the strategic plan which was supported by the interview results that it is available online. However, as the interviewee respondents expressed, finalized strategic plan documents were not adequately available at the college and department levels. Moreover, the strategic plan was not well communicated, no discussion held been made with the general staff and, as a result, shared understanding was not created. This implies lack of common understanding about strategic directions as well as goals of the university. It might also affect the efforts, motivation as well as commitment of the employees to emerging strategic needs.

The intension with Item 6 of Table 4 was to explore whether or not employees at different levels participated in the process of strategic plan development. According to the responses, only 6 (28.6%) academic leaders and 7 (15.9%) instructors replied that employees of the university participated in the development of the current strategic plan. As the responses of the majority indicated, however, employees in different units as well as stakeholders did not involve in the development of the strategic plan. This, in turn, not only reduces employees' contribution during plan formulation but also affects their shard understanding, commitment and sense of ownership which ultimately affect the effectiveness of strategic leadership practice in the university. This was supported by the interview

result that employees of the university did not actively participate during the formulation of the strategic plan. According to the interview, the document was developed depending on the direction given from the Ministry of Education with the intention to support the growth and transformational plan of the country. The results of the interview further revealed that committees consisting of members from different functional areas were formulated to develop the strategic plan. The committee, consequently, consulted some key employees and attempted to incorporate their feedback at different levels of the planning process. This indicates that the preparation of the plan lacks broad participation of employees working at different levels of the university which might affect its implementation.

SWOT analysis is an integral part of the strategic planning process. It provides comprehensive information about the organizations' current and the future. It also provides information on which the organization works and uses the information to better understand the context in which it works. Table 5 discusses the external and internal environmental analysis activities of the university during the strategic planning process.

Table 5. SWOT Analysis Activities

Items	Academic Leaders					Instructors					X^2	Sig (2 tailed)
	AG N	%	**UN** N	%	**T**	**A** N	%	**U** N	%	**T**		
1. Data about the external environments were collected and analyzed to identify key threats and opportunities of the university.	10	41.7	13	4.2	4	13	31	23	54.8	42	1.979	.372
2. Institutional/internal factors were assessed to identify key strengths and weaknesses of the university	15	62.5	7	29.2	24	14	31.8	19	43.2	44	5.482	.039
3. The university performance and operational activities are compared with other similar higher institutions	15	62.5	7	29.2	24	23	52.3	17	38.6	44	.695	.706
4. The result of situational analysis was used to identify core competencies	14	58.3	9	37.5	24	29	69	10	23.8	42	1.487	.476
5. The result of situational analysis was used to formulate strategic plan	12	54.5	7	1.8	22	9	21.4	28	66.7	42	0997	.607
6. The mission, goals and strategies were reviewed based on the external and internal environment analysis	5	20.8	16	66.6	24	10	23.3	32	72.7	44	4.028	.133

As observed from responses to Item 1 of Table 5 [10 (41.7%)] academic leaders and 13 (31%) instructors agreed that the university carried out the analysis of the external environment to identify key threats and opportunities to which majority [13, 54.2%)] of the academic leaders and 23 (54.8%) instructors replied neither agreed nor disagreed. The results interview conducted with the office of the institutional transformation head shows that the university has conducted a person in charge a given key unit revealed that external environment was analyzed to identify stakeholders' needs and priorities, recognize opportunities, risks and trends that could affect the organizations' competitiveness. This shows that the university has utilized the information related to social, economic, political and technological environments.

While responding to Item 2 of Table 5, 15 (62.5%) of academic leaders and 14 (31.8%) instructors reported that the university had conducted analysis of the internal environment to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the university whereas significant number [19, 43.2%)] of the instructors took a neutral position. One interview respondent who was in charge key leadership position underlined that the university has conducted internal environmental analysis to identify organizational capacities and constraints. This shows that the university identified its potential strengths and weaknesses which would help executives make sound decisions in the selection of strategies that help the organization remain competent in the dynamic environment. The intention with Item 3 of Table 5 was to explore whether the university performance and operational activities were compared with other similar institutions which was confirmed by 15 (62.5%) academic leaders and 23 (52.3%) instructors. This shows that the university attempts to learn good practices from similar institutions to improve its operational efficiency and achieve its goals to remain competent in providing quality services to its stakeholders. Item 4 of Table 5 was asked to check if result of the SWOT analysis was used to identify core competencies of the university. Consequently, as can be seen from the responses, 14 (58.3%) of the academic leaders and 29 (69%) instructors replied that the university used the results of SWOT in the identification of core competencies. This shows that the university identified individuals' abilities and organizational potential as well as understood how these potential or core competencies contribute to addressing a given challenge that helps the organization excel other similar organizations in providing better services that address stakeholders' expectations and achieve its mission.

Respondents were further asked whether the result of situational analysis was used to formulate a strategic plan. As one could see from the responses in Table 5, majority [12, 54.5%)] of academic leaders replied that the university utilized results of environmental analysis to formulate strategic plans although majority [28, 66.7%)] of the instructors were neutral in their responses. This might be attributed either they were not involved or   lacked adequate information about the strategic planning development process. This implies that that top-level managers either failed to encourage staff participation in the development of the plan or failed to effectively communicate why and how the strategic plan of the university was developed. This, in turn, implies that there was no participatory planning approach which might significantly affect the implementation of the strategic plan and the practice of strategic leadership.

Finally, respondents were asked to rate their opinion on the extent to which the mission, goals and strategies were reviewed based on environmental analysis. Accordingly, 16 (66.6%) academic leaders and 32 (72.7%) instructors did not know whether the mission, goals and strategies were reviewed based on the analysis of the internal and external environmental. This shows that employees of the university did not know whether the strategic plan was periodically reviewed or not or that they were not effectively communicated or informed about what was going on. This indicates that there was lack of effective communication between employees and the management to which Deans of the sample colleges agreed. As opposed to this, while responding to interview, one respondent from key leadership position reported that strategies were periodically reviewed. The responses of the interview indicated that the analysis helped identify emerging environmental factors that were either favorable or unfavorable to the achievement of goals or objectives and also helped exhaustively evaluate alternatives and modify strategies to cope with the emerging demands or challenges of the university.

Table 6. Strategic Planning Process

Items	Academic Leaders					Instructors					X 2	Sign. (2 tailed)
	AG		UN		T	A		U		T		
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%			
1. Top executives take the initiative for the formulation of strategic plan.	17	70.8	4	16.7	24	28	63.6	8	18.8	44	.349	.840
2. Employees at different levels participate in the strategic planning process	7	29.2	9	37.5	24	8	18.6	9	20.9	43	4.576	.101
3. Strategies are clearly communicated to all employees	4	16.7	11	45.8	24	10	23.3	8	18.6	43	5.640	.060
4. Strategies are periodically reviewed to ensure the achievement of goals	8	33.3	9	37.5	24	8	19.5	12	29.3	41	3.201	.202
5. The annual operational plan is developed based on the strategic plan	12	60	7	35	20	25	56.8	15	23.4	44	3.792	.150

The process of strategic planning, above all, demands the commitment of top-level management in setting direction and allocating adequate human and financial resources. It also requires the participation and consensus of stakeholders on what needs to be done and how to do it. Allocating adequate resources to assess the current situation and set mechanisms that help address the needs and priorities of the stakeholders. Table 6 discusses how the strategic planning process was carried out. With Item 1 of Table 6, thus, the respondents were asked whether top executives take the initiative in the strategic planning processes. As one could see from the responses to Item 1, the majority [17 (70.8%)] of academic leaders and 28 (63.6%) instructors replied that top executives of the university not only take the initiative but also that they were aware of its importance which clearly implies their commitment to strategically lead the university in a direction that helps them address the emerging stakeholder demands in a competitive environment and recognition of strategic plan in that it helps in The interview responses obtained from the respondents in charge of key offices were also consistent with the above finding.

Respondents were further asked whether employees at different levels involved in the strategic planning process. Accordingly, while responding to Item 2, only 7 (29.2%) academic leaders and 8 (18.6%) instructors reacted that employees participated implying that the strategic planning process was not participatory. This shows that the employees were not encouraged to involve. This, in turn, implies that the employees might not have a common understanding about the strategic plan and that their knowledge, skills and experiences were not effectively used. This, consequently, might have reduced their commitment, consensus and a sense of ownership of the plan. This, thus, might be a challenge for top executives to strategically lead the efforts and resources of the university to achieve objectives set, accomplish the mission and realize the vision of the university.

The intention with Item 3 was to assess whether strategies were communicated to employees of the university or not. In their responses to this item 3, 4 (16.7%) academic leaders and 10 (23.3%) instructors replied that strategies were communicated to all employees, whereas significant number [11 (45.8%)] of the academic leaders did not reveal their position, i.e., whether they agree or otherwise. It was also understood from the interview results that there was a gap in effectively communicating and creating a shard understanding of the strategies and strategic goals of the university. This shows that employees might not understand what to achieve and how to achieve it. This may cause misalignment of resources and create confusion in implementing strategies to achieve the strategic goals and accomplish the mission of the university.

Regarding Item 4, the responses of less than half 8 (33.3%) of academic leaders and 8 (19.5%) of instructors showed that the strategies of the university were not periodically reviewed to ensure the achievement of strategic goals. The interview conducted with the deans also revealed that strategies were not periodically reviewed to cope with the emerging challenges that university faces. This indicates that strategies were less flexible to adapt to changing circumstances of the university or to deal with those challenges that might affect the achievement of organizational goals. With regard to Item 5 of table 6, i.e., whether the annual operational plan was developed based on the strategic plan of the university, 12, and 60%) academic leaders and 25 (56.8%) instructors expressed that operational plans were prepared on the basis of strategic plan. The interview conducted with deans also confirmed the above finding. The interview respondents further indicated that the university has been implementing BSC (Business score card) as one of the management strategies to achieve its goals. To implement BSC, at the university level, core dimensions for operational activities were identified and cascaded down to colleges and, then, to departments. Yet, as the respondents pointed out, the dimensions were not cascaded to individual implementers. This, consequently, affects the performance of each employee, functional units and departments, college and institutes and even of the university at large. Had the cascading of the BSC dimensions and continuous monitoring and evaluation been properly conducted, not only would the university have achieved its strategic goals but also its performance progressively enhanced. In today's competitive environment, organizations face various challenges that affect their effectiveness. To survive and continuously grow in such a competitive environment, organizations need to continuously scan and understand their environment and modify the existing or set appropriate strategies that enable them to overcome the emerging challenges. Table 7 presents the challenges that affect the strategic leadership practice of the university.

Table 7. Challenges of strategic leadership practices

Items	Academic Leaders AG N	%	UN N	%	T	Instructors A N	%	U N	%	T	X 2	Sign. (2 tailed)
1. The strategies are poorly formulated	-	-	8	33.3	24	6	13.6	11	25	44	11.186	.004
2. Long term implication of strategies are not communicated to employees.	9	37.5	6	25.0	24	9	20.4	6	13.6	44	4.065	.131
3. Top level managers do not provide strategic direction	3	12.5	2	8.3	24	7	15.9	3	6.8	44	6.214	.045
4. Lack of top managers commitment for the implementation of the strategies	15	62.5	3	12.5	24	26	59.1	5	11.3	44	.947	.623
5. Low competency of leaders to implement strategies	9	25.0	5	20.8	24	11	25	8	18.1	44	1.849	.397
6. Lack of integration among workforce, resources, culture, process and strategies	15	62.5	5	20.8	24	31	70.5	8	18.2	44	.532	.766
7. Lack of periodic monitoring and/or evaluation of performance	19	79.1	2	8.3	24	31	70.4	6	13.6	44	2.335	.311
8. The human resources are not developed to support the implementation of strategies	17	70.8	4	16.6	24	28	63.6	3	6.8	44	.1185	.912
9. Low employees commitment and motivation to implement strategies	19	79.1	3	12.5	24	33	75	7	15.9	44	.491	.782
10. Implementation plans are not developed to support strategic changes	9	37.5	7	29.2	24	3	6.8	24	54.5	44	10.597	.005
11. Frequent change of customer demands /preferences	16	66.6	2	8.3	24	27	61.3	6	13.6	44	2.474	.290
12. High competition in the environment	18	75	1	4.1	24	31	70.4	8	18.2	44	1.901	.386
13. Unfavorable government policies, rules and regulation	7	29.2	4	16.6	24	11	25.0	5	11.3	44	1.118	.572
14. Economic condition of the country	17	70.8	3	12.5	24	26	59.1	3	6.8	44	2.408	.300
15. Frequent changes in technological developments	9	37.5	8	33.3	24	9	20.4	4	9.1	44	.386	.824

It discusses the internal and external challenges that might have a significant impact on the implementation of the strategic plan and strategic leadership practices of the university. As can be seen from Table 7, the data revealed that failure to communicate long-term implications of strategies, lack of integration among the workforce, resources, process and strategies, failure to periodically monitor and evaluate performance, failure to develop effective human resources and low employee commitment and motivation were major internal challenges that were identified to affect the practice of effective strategic leadership in the university. Moreover, lack of institutional autonomy, absence of accountability and poor ethical practices were some of the major challenges reported by respondents. Furthermore, the interview responses revealed that frequent change in stakeholders' demands/preferences, high competition from the external environment and economic condition of the nation were some of the external challenges were reported to affect the strategic leadership practice of the university.

CONCLUSIONS

Today's organizations work in dynamic and competitive environment which requires leaders to work on continuously improving strategic leadership. This necessitates the need to properly examine the environment to strategically respond to expectations of stakeholders and emerging challenges. Without effective strategic leadership, it would be difficult for today's universities to remain competitive. This being the case, the findings this study showed gaps in ensuring the provision real strategic leadership and adequately and skillfully influencing employees to voluntarily implement strategic decisions and achieve strategic goals, accomplish missions and, eventually, realize the vision of the university. There also was a gap in being committed to the required strategic leadership actions to respond to the changing circumstances. Moreover, there was a gap in effectively communicating strategies, supporting employees and sharing what needs to be done and how to do it. Furthermore, there was a the findings revealed problems in encouraging and supporting employees to internalize core values of the university, ensuring that core values guide employees' behavior and action in a day-to-day university activities. The findings also showed such gaps as failure in ensuring proper communication of the university's vision, mission and core values, involving employees in not only strategic plan development and implementation but also evaluation of the implemented strategic plan, ensuring proper allocation of financial, human and other resources to enhance the achievement of the intended strategic goals, effectively integrating the activities and efforts of employees, aligning operational plans with the strategic goals and creating an inbuilt kind of monitoring and evaluation system.

It was understood from the findings of the study that Jimma University had written vision, mission, goals and statements of values. Yet, the majority of the respondents complained the vision's lack of clarity as a result of which, as they reported, it might not inspire the employees alike. Moreover, it was learned from the responses of the participants that the mission was not well communicated, practiced and reflected in the day-to-day behavior and action of the employees. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that employees of the university may lack common understanding regarding the vision, mission and core values of the university which, in turn, my imply employees' lack commitment and motivation to contribute to the achievement strategic goals.

It was also learned from the findings that employees did not adequately participate in the strategic plan formulation. The findings revealed that not only were strategies insufficiently communicated but also were not periodically reviewed. Thus, it could be concluded that employees may not understand   as to what is expected of them in both short and long terms. They may also lack a feeling of ownership and commitment. In addition, the results of the study indicated that activities were not performed as per the action plan formulated and the work process. The results also showed that strategies were not continuously reviewed given the dynamism of the environment. The findings indicated not only inadequacy resources but also lack of commitment in allocating resources available, aligning activities, processes and strategies and continuously assessing the internal and external environment to make necessary modifications to strategies in a way it would enable the university to address emerging challenges. Therefore, it could be safe to conclude that effective strategic leadership was not exercised and strategic leadership actions were not effectively implemented. Put in brief, it could be concluded that strategic leadership practice was not as expected as it could be. Possible conclusion could also be

that academic leaders might primarily be short-term oriented and did not properly communicate the university's strategic vision in such a way that all employees clearly understand, internalize and integrate into their actions and be able to speak just as was the case with NASA cleaner who responded to the question she was asked as to what she was doing while she was cleaning by saying "I am sending the man to the moon".

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were forwarded. Vision helps guides an organization in desired directions by inspiring and gaining the commitment of employees. Jimma University has a clear vision, mission and statements of values. Yet, the vision, mission and values were not properly communicated to all employees alike. Therefore, it is advisable that offices of the Strategic Management of the university under the guidance of the top level executive and in collaboration with the office of External Relations and Communication continuously organize forums for employees, both academic and administrative, at different levels to create and also strengthen awareness of the vision, mission, goals, values and strategies of the university to enhance understanding, gain consensus and commitment. In addition, academic leaders as well as managers at different levels of the university are advised to show their commitment to properly understand, translate and effectively communicate the vision, mission, goals, values and strategies to the staff they lead and encourage them to make part of their daily activities like the NASA's cleaner. Moreover, academic leaders and other managers at different levels are strongly advised to spend adequate time interacting with the staff they lead and get them comprehend the university's strategic direction and vision, mission, long- and short-term goals, objectives and strategies of their respective functional units.

There is doubt that human resource development plays critical role in enhancing the university's capacity to survive and compete in the future. Thus, the university needs to provide continuous short- and long-term on- and off-the-job trainings to help employees gain new skills and knowledge and develop positive attitude that enable them to effectively achieve strategic goals and accomplish the mission of the university.

Top level leadership is strongly advised to relentlessly work on equipping academic leaders and managers at different levels of the university with the skills and knowledge necessary to continuously assess the effectiveness of strategies in relation to the intended goals. There is also a need to ensure proper allocation of resources as per the priority areas of the university. Moreover, it is advisable that they ensure employees are provided opportunity to participate in setting goals and strategies as well as decisions related to the implementation of strategies. Furthermore, it is recommended that there be a better information communication system to share information that facilitates communication between and/ or among employees in all directions and across all units of the university.

Culture is an important part of how an organization functions. Organizational cultures are important in making sense of things and properly measure the level of satisfaction of the employees and the productivity of the whole organization. A good organizational culture is upheld through shared values and specific rituals. As the analogy obviously goes, having a good organizational culture is like "having a strong, healthy immune system, i.e., when the culture is compromised, so is the organization". People in leadership positions, thus, play a tremendously significant role in developing productive, healthy organizational culture. Great leaders have a thorough understanding of the importance of shaping an organizational culture that gradually develops and flourishes. Organizational culture is not static. In today's dynamic environment, organizational cultures that survive are those that are progressive and evolving. Although core beliefs should be persistent, goals, objectives, strategies, procedures and the organization's image need to be carefully reviewed on continuous basis. Change often brings about incredible benefits. One of the responsibilities of organizational leaders, thus, is to frequently tell their employees about the benefits of the change and encourage them to be aware of the benefits of the right changes. With that said, it is advisable that Jimma university leaders, although change is both good and necessary, before they make a decision to change something about the university's culture, they first need to ensure proper communication of the vision, in particular and

strategic plan, in general. With regard to this, Jimma University leaders are advised to recognize that their employees see that management sees the change as good and important and that management is confident in that decision before their employees can be confident about the decision of the intended change as per the university's vision.

It is also recommended that Jimma University leaders, managers at different levels and all employees work hard to improve the current work culture to enhance the practice of strategic leadership. Top-level leaders, in particular, are advised to work on creating a shared and collaborative work culture. Moreover, it is advisable that they promote good ethical practices by rewarding good behaviors while legally discouraging unethical behaviors. Furthermore, it is strongly recommended that there be a system of accountability by introducing both individual and collective performance management system. Finally, there also is a need to motivate employees by introducing reward and incentive systems.

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