

# How to Improve the Performance of State Universities: An Integration of Strategic Management and Performance Management Processes

Caxton Shonhiwa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Zimbabwe Open University

\*Corresponding Author's Email: [shonhiwac@zou.ac.zw](mailto:shonhiwac@zou.ac.zw)

## Abstract

The paper interrogates the performance of Zimbabwean State Universities and proposes the integration of strategic management and performance management. The contention was that the strategic management process could not lead to high institutional performance because it was divorced from the sphere of managing institutional performance, and the removal of the operational staff from the strategic planning process. A constructivist paradigm was adopted as it was viewed to be the best suited to allow the researcher to become one with participants and 'get' into their psych to extract their lived experiences. A group of well-informed persons from the target institutions was purposively identified and interviewed over some time. The acquired data were transcribed and then analysed for meaning. The findings were that the strategic planning process should be integrated with the performance management process. The operational staff must be involved and participate in both processes for purposes of process ownership and buy-in. their participation resulted in corporate objectives being cascaded down to the operational level without their loss of meaning. The conclusion was that the performance management process should be integrated with the strategic planning process if state institutions were to achieve their vision.

**Key words:** Strategic Management, Performance Management, and integration process

## Introduction

The Oxford English Dictionary defines "performance" as "The accomplishment, execution, carrying out and working out of something ordered or undertaken," whereas performance management is about managing the performance. Performance can be thought of as conduct, or how groups, teams, and individuals carry out their tasks (Dobija et al., 2019).

Performance Management system's impact on individual employee performance and motivation toward organizational effectiveness should be critical in any strategic planning and management process. The whole aim of strategic management is to employ and align all resources, policies, and procedures of an organisation to the achievement of the set goals and objectives.

The reality was that there was a complete separation between strategic management and performance management in almost all journal articles studied for this paper. The ritual to formulate a strategic plan, followed by a strategy implementation plan and an evaluation plan

before the performance management plan was produced compromised the performance of the organisation.

It is the contention of this paper that there is an inalienable relationship between the strategic management process and the demands of the performance management system in university education in Zimbabwe and across the world.

### **Background to the study**

The definition of Performance Management is making continual progress in positively impacting the key indicators of your business (Grigore et al., 2000)(Adler, 2018). This could appeal to the comprehension of most practitioners in an organisation at the operations level, but the higher echelons prefer to be excluded from the realm of hands-on work. This is why the definition normally refers to the human resources department as the custodians of performance management.

Performance Management, in everyday parlance, refers to the setting of objectives and targets for the individual employees at the operational or functional level, the periodic interaction between the individual and the supervisor to ensure progress is registered, the offering of coaching and mentorship to the individual and the appraisal at the end of the period. The rating determines whether the individual outstanding performance gets a thirteenth check or some financial reward; the reward could also be in other material forms. The outstanding lethargic worker is also recognised for their lethargy and receive their condemnation; this could be in the form of a written letter warning them to pull up their socks or risk getting excluded from the employment list.

An organisation designs a Performance Management System that supports the core business and design a recognition model that challenges the workforce to work hard, become team players and avoid anything that dissuades them from stretching their effort to win recognition. The two major purposes of any performance management system are to enhance the organisation's output or performance level and to develop the individual worker; by developing the individual worker the organisation is developing itself.

The setting of organisational vision, mission, goals, and objectives takes place at the corporate level, the strategic level and the setting of individual goals and objectives is reserved for the operational management. However, a deeper interrogation of this arrangement reveals a relationship that must interlock the two processes.

This paper sought to establish how the integrating of the strategic management and performance management processes could be a desired development in a university.

### **Statement of the problem**

Can the strategic management process be integrated with the performance management process of an organisation to ensure the vision is achieved?

### **Research questions**

Main research question

1. How can the strategic management and performance management processes be integrated in an organisation?

### Subsidiary questions

1. Why would a strategic management process be integrated with the performance management process?
2. Which specific activities can be integrated to achieve an organisation's vision?

### Strategic Management

The dominant idea of the modern era is "strategic thinking", which has taken the role of earlier management practices like "administration" or "planification." The word "strategy" has its roots in the military and is derived from the Greek word "strategos," which means 'military general'. Its significance has changed throughout time as it has been used to describe many human endeavours, particularly corporate operations. Understanding the competitive environment and interpreting the effects of competition on a business are two of the business strategists' biggest challenges (Karangwa & Irechukwu, 2023).

Strategic management is described as the "process wherein goals and objectives are determined, policies are formed, and strategies are selected in order to achieve the overall purposes or mission of a company" by Steiss (1985:1). He breaks down the procedure into its three component processes, describing it as a system:

1. Strategic planning identifies the goals and strategies of an organization.
2. Resource management arranges and distributes resources among organizational units to carry out the plans.
3. Control and assessment guarantee that the strategies are carried out. When businesses build the means for putting their strategies into action, they are engaging in strategic management.

Several authors have explored the idea of strategy across time. The definition of a company's long-term goals and objectives, the adoption of activities, and the allocation of essential resources for attainment of the goals are some of them (6. *Performance Management The Aims of the Section Are To* :, n.d.; *The Ultimate Strategy Tips Collection*, n.d.; Dandira et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2008). Chandler addressed a model of the objectives, policies, purposes, goals, and strategies to attain them addressed in such a way that they define which business the organization is or will be, according to Andrews is the strategy. To create a durable distinction in the market, Porter states that the approach is to choose a collection of activities in which a company stands out. The differentiation originates from the activities chosen and how they are carried out.

Armstrong (1986), on the other hand, believes that the mechanistic perspective is constrained and contributes from a dynamic and organic standpoint. According to the latest theories in the natural and social sciences, strategic processes are more complex than just rationalist models of unitary players and take into consideration the messy nature of reality (Adler, 2018). It asserts that although the organic perspective is dynamic, uncertain, interacting, and integrating, the mechanical perspective for the formulation of strategies is discrete, directed, and differentiated.

According to Powell (2018), an organization's mission provides the answer to the question of why it exists. The business that an organization is focused on, the needs that its goods and

services address, the market in which the firm has grown, and the organization's reputation in the public are all defined. What organizations should look like in the coming years is addressed in the vision. The desired future state of the company is defined and described. The goal of the vision is to direct, manage, and inspire the entire organization in order to bring about the desired state of the organization. The values specify the collection of tenets, convictions, and guidelines that guide how the organization is run. The outcomes that are desired to be accomplished within a certain time frame are indicated by the objectives. These components make up the institutional ideology and underpin the corporate culture (Ferguson et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2019). The main goal of defining corporate values is to create a reference framework that directs and controls how a business operates.

In summary, Strategic Management is all about identifying and outlining the strategies that managers may use to improve performance and provide their company a competitive advantage. If a company's profitability is better than the industry average for all businesses, it is said to have a competitive edge. A manager's decisions and actions that determine the performance of the company can also be grouped together as strategic management. For the manager to make the best decisions, the general and competitive organizational environment must be thoroughly understood and analysed by all the stakeholders of the organisation; the top-down strategic management process results in the majority of employees not taking part in the process.

### **Performance Management**

Rashidi et al. (2022) define performance management as whatever a company does to raise employees' individual and group performance. This can involve giving out bonuses, establishing performance criteria, and helping out or actively managing underperformers. A company can be any type of organisation or enterprise like a university or government department.

Performance management is the process of creating goals for a company and effectively managing to accomplish those goals and ultimately provide the intended outcomes. Strategic management can be thought of as performance management at a higher level in that regard (Maimela, 2014; Osmani & (Ramolli), 2012).

Harvard University's performance management strategy is founded on the notion that regular, meaningful dialogue between managers and employees produces better outcomes and greater engagement for all parties. All Harvard administrative, professional, and support personnel are invited to schedule as many meetings as they like with their managers to go through their job priorities, performance, and personal and professional development goals. To lessen the pressure of one-time, high-stakes performance reviews at the end of the year, managers are expected to plan and prepare these meetings in advance.

In institutions of higher education, peer reviews have long been used in higher education (HE) institutions to gauge the performance of the academic staff (Ministry et al., 2022). An appraisal system and, presumably, incentives are used as part of a performance management process that is increasingly used to supplement this. Individual and team appraisal are both potential components of performance management techniques, which should be in line with the institution's overall plan.

According to Camilleri et al., (2018), and Nisio et al. (2018) Performance management is a procedure to help all teachers grow professionally, to enhance instruction and learning, to promote school improvement, and to elevate academic standards. Regular reviews are a part of effective performance management. When objectives are achieved, it is appropriate to rejoice and give staff a reward. Employees are highly motivated, and eventually, the firm benefits. Performance management is a thorough process, that may be divided into three separate phases: coaching, corrective action, and termination.

Degli et al. (2015) define the role of human resource management in the performance management process as to assess and ascertain both the job requirements and existing employee performance. When it comes to evaluating the company's goals, human resource management can benefit from the information that performance management systems can produce. In determining the level of employee performance, the Human Resources managers must ensure that performance management meetings are scheduled during a time when everyone can participate fully. The allocation of roles and responsibilities and the measurement of performance should be undertaken during the planning and review meetings when the processes are likely to produce best results (Biondi & Russo, 2022).

When it comes to evaluating the company's goals, human resource management can benefit from the information that performance management systems can produce. Performance data can also be utilized for HR planning, to assess the relative value of occupations, as a selection criterion for hiring specific employee types, and to validate selection processes.

### **Empirical studies**

Several studies were reviewed to determine the width and breadth of performance management implementation, including the areas in which performance management was employed.

The purpose of Performance Management is to motivate and improve teaching quality and to increase research productivity, performance management has become essential (Maimela, 2014). The public sector follows the same management concepts as the commercial sector, including implementing performance management systems.

Empirical evidence from previous studies suggests that the introduction and implementation of performance management systems in academic institutions often result in tension between academic employees and management, thereby heightening the age-long debate on the necessity for academic freedom in institutions of higher learning globally (Degli et al., 2015; Kallio et al., 2021; Ministry et al., 2022; Zvavahera, 2013)(Maimela, 2014).

According to empirical data from earlier studies (Rashidi et al., 2022)(Kallio et al., 2021; Organisations, n.d.; Rashidi et al., 2022), the introduction and implementation of performance management systems in academic institutions frequently lead to conflict between academic staff and management, escalating the long-running argument over the importance of academic freedom in higher education institutions around the world.

According to the research's findings, the institution's academic staff members are happy with the performance management system that management has put in place (Camilleri et al., 2018; Dobija et al., 2019; Kallio et al., 2021; Organisations, n.d.; Rashidi et al., 2022). The survey also revealed that academics do not find the performance bonus that results from the

deployment of the performance management system to be sufficiently motivating, thus management should reassess it. Overall, data from earlier studies indicate that the introduction and implementation of performance management systems in academic institutions frequently lead to conflict between academic staff and management, escalating the long-running argument over the importance of academic freedom in higher education institutions around the world.

The Georgian National University SEU experienced, through performance management, higher teaching standards, keeping up with modern academic innovations, and producing qualified graduates who can compete in the job market have all depended on managing the performance of academic personnel (Tengiz Taktakishvili, 1970).

Amanullah Khan Director (2021) say the Performance Management process entails establishing precise objectives and corresponding plans, monitoring the execution of specified plans, getting employee performance feedback, evaluating the job performed by the employees, and creating compensation schemes for successful performers. Employee compensation is only the beginning of the process. To improve the performance of both successful and failed employees, corrective actions must be done.

Anvari & Janjaria (2023) say the aim of measuring performance is to improve performance and align measures introduced by the organizational unit with overall organizational goals.

In order to implement a successful PM process in HEI relevant performance indicators (PIs) must be elaborated and a set of relevant criteria must be defined based on identified measure (Anvari & Janjaria, 2023; Muthoni Nduati & Wanyoike, 2022; Peng, 2022).

An effective performance management process assures that academic staff perform in accordance with the set objectives of the academic program and the overall goals of the HEI (Amanullah Khan Director, 2021; Anvari & Janjaria, 2023; Muthoni Nduati & Wanyoike, 2022; Nisio et al., 2018; Peng, 2022; Tengiz Taktakishvili, 1970).

Biondi & Russo (2022) identify employee's productivity and employee motivation as important elements in performance management, resulting from a properly constituted planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling framework.

1. **Planning** – Identify weak areas of academic staff performance and plan training, workshops, and desirable targets to achieve that will serve personnel development.
2. **Organizing** – Use evaluation results for promotion or dismissal of the individual staff members, give more hours of lecturing to ones who outperformed others and in general, reorganize the teaching process while giving priorities to top-performer staff.
3. **Motivating** – Use evaluation results to draw both financial and non-financial incentives; 4. **Controlling** – Identify deviation from the target results and take corrective actions; ensure that academic staff performance is aligned with the goals of the academic program and those of the HEI in general.
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Managing the performance of academic staff has been essential to maintaining higher teaching standards, keeping up with contemporary academic innovations, and creating qualified graduates who can compete in the labour market (Den et al., 2004). The Performance Management process comprises setting up clear objectives and associated plans, keeping an

eye on how those plans are being carried out, receiving employee performance feedback, assessing how well the employees are doing their jobs, and developing pay plans for top performers. Paying employees is just the start of the process (Den et al., 2004; Kallio et al., 2021; Tahiri et al., 2021). Corrective measures must be put in place in order to increase both successful and unsuccessful employee performance.

### **Gap identification**

The empirical studies covered several areas of importance in many universities. However, there was only one study that suggested the integration of strategic planning with performance management. The current study, therefore, pursued this argument in a bid to strengthen it and render it more appealing to institutions of higher education; the strategic management activities of planning, resource allocation and instituting control mechanisms should be integrated with the performance management activities of setting unit and individual goals and objectives, allocating resources, mentoring, and coaching the performer and evaluating performance.

The integration of strategic management and performance management improved the performance of state universities.

### **Methodology**

The constructivist philosophy was adopted for the study, where the reality was created through social interaction and knowledge and insights were cultivated (Pole, 2007). The worldview adopted, and resulting from the philosophy, was the qualitative paradigm.

The case study design was adopted because the purposefully identified research participants were viewed as individual cases that needed to be interrogated through in-depth interviews to learn their lived realities; whether their experiences informed them in one direction or not, and what direction that was (Dawson, 2002; Nenty, 2009; Pole, 2007) (Saliya, 2017). The in-depth interviews were complemented by a study of the strategic management documents and performance management reports.

The researcher interacted with participants over a length of time to extract from them their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations with regard to how state institutions could improve their performance, both at the strategic and operational level. The discussions started off at an informal level and progressed over time to the exchange of WhatsApp messages and a few formal in-depth interviews. These allowed the researcher to pursue pertinent ideas and suggestions to its ultimate conclusion for a complete meaning. These exchanges were discontinued when the researcher realised that there were no new insights trickling in, but the old ones were being repeated (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The researcher transcribed the data generated in the in-depth interviews and analysed it for information that showed their thoughts, insights and perceptions built over years of experience. The researcher used the transcription to extract the meaning that was conveyed by the participants through the emic perspective (Hunt et al., 2011). The emic perspective resulted in the researcher deriving meaning from the information by the participants, which formed the finding of the study.

## Results and discussion

The analysis process that led to the findings started from analysing the qualifications, experience, age, and organizational positions of the participants. The premise was that credible and fair information came from knowledgeable and experienced participants whose longevity in their fields of employment enabled them to gather invaluable insights and information.

**Table1.** The characteristics of study participants

NO.	NAME	QUALIFICATION	EXPERIENCE -YEARS	POSITION	AGE - YEARS
1.	Prof Reginald Sigauke	PhD in Business Management	31	Pro Vice Chancellor – Corporate Planning and Business Development	48
2.	Prof Augustine Nyuke	PhD in Human Resource Management	28	Pro Vice Chancellor – Academic Affairs and Recreation	43
3.	Prof Imelda Nyekete	PhD in Business Development and Ethics	23	Director in Corporate Governance	37
4.	Prof Gerald Mutumwi	PhD in Business Management	38	Vice Chancellor	61
5.	Dr Sibusiso Nyika	PhD in Development Studies	27	Director in Research and Innovation	49

The researcher coded the transcribed data and broke it down into themes that represented the major meanings the participants brought forward (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Shatkay & Wilbur, 2000).

**Table 2.** Themes and sub-themes generated

NO.	THEME	SUB-THEME	SOURCE
1.	Integration	a. Linked activities. b. Combine source of energy	WhatsApp messages participants 1, 3 & 4
2.	Motivation and commitment	Recognition Celebration	In-depth interview participant 3
3.	Leadership	Shared responsibility	In-depth interview participant 4

The major theme that was extracted from the transcript on the interactions indicated that the activities that are undertaken in the strategic planning process should be integrated with those activities undertaken in the performance management process. Dr Nyika said, *The whole of the organisation should come together and plan for the future of the organisation as one. There is a Shona proverb that says that one finger does not crush a louse to death.* For instance, the

strategic goal setting process must, of necessity, be open to all members of the university, or to as many as possible for ownership, knowledge, and buy-in. The energising process of coming together, arguing for hours on end over the direction and scope of the university should be open to all internal stakeholders, source of combined energy. The cascading down of goals and objectives from the corporate to the operational levels must be understood by the operatives. This cascading down of goals and objectives was equated to a waterfall by Prof Nyuke, who said, *If the ground at the bottom does not receive water falling from the ground above to result in a waterfall, water would not fall.* The parcelling out of individual assignments must be understood to come from an agreed set of goals and key result areas of the university; internal stakeholders will always be committed to work that they took part in setting out. Prof Nyekete agreed with this perception and said, *Many universities do not take seriously the important contribution of external stakeholders, it was as important as the contribution of internal stakeholders; a symbiotic relationship should exist between the two parties.*

The inclusion of internal stakeholders in the strategic management and performance management was a source of motivation and commitment. It was also a source of a sense of belonging that internal stakeholders felt when they participated in the decision-making during the strategic management and performance management processes. The participation bought the commitment and engendered the commitment.

The end result was the perception by individuals in the institution that they were participants, and worthy ones for that matter, that they were socially part of the whole institution; the feeling of 'them' and 'us' did not arise. Prof Nyekete said, *The university belongs to the internal stakeholders, just like it belonged to external stakeholders, who interact in one way or the other.* If there is that mutual interaction between and among all stakeholders, then those inside the institution and all those external stakeholders should work together and mutually support each other based on shared goals and objectives.

The performance of individuals should be celebrated and rewarded. This was the sub-themes that emanated from the interaction, individual performers who outperformed their peers needed to be recognized first and rewarded, second. Prof Mutumwi intimated that *employee whose effort is not recognised end up feeling like fish out of the institutional water.* He proceeded to state, *The greatest form of motivation is the reward given to an outstanding worker, whatever nature the recognition took.* The nature of the reward or the recognition may not be revealed as all long all avenues of recognising the performance of the worker were considered. Reward was not confined to the payment of a monetary reward but ranged from material to monetary reward. The same was true of recognition, there was no format for recognising an outstanding performer, several methods of recognition could be considered. Prof Sigauke summed it up when he said, *An institution that demands superior performance from its workforce must exercise superior recognition of outstanding performers, the celebration of outstanding individual work must be the first step in celebrating the outstanding performance of the institution. The culture of an institution must be built on the outstanding performance of individual workers.*

The trustworthiness of the findings was achieved through the implementation of five strategies. The researcher submitted to each of the participants a transcript of their contribution for checking and correcting where they might have felt misrepresented. This served the purpose that each participant's views were reproduced as they desired them to be presented. The second strategy was to describe the process in detail, without leaving or adding a minor detail that might appear meaningless to the ordinary reader; thick description. The third strategy was to

triangulate each idea or view; the questions were asked in in-depth interviews, in WhatsApp messages that were open-ended, and in informal interactions. The answer that emerged from the different interactions proved to be the true response. The next strategy was to have prolonged interaction period; the interactions took an average of three months to complete, time long enough for relations to have firmed and the truth to grow roots. Lastly, the whole process of data gathering was enfolded in an environment of trust and integrity. The contributions of the participants were treated with the respect and trust they deserved.

The researcher considered the themes and understood them to mean that the universities would perform better if the strategic management process dovetailed the performance management process; the set corporate targets were the ones that were cascaded down to be achieved at the shop floor. The goals and key result areas that were set at the corporate level were assigned to individual employ to achieve, there was no feasible reason why the process of setting corporate objective could not be extended to involve those who performed the work at the operational level.

The other consideration was that there was no conflict of interest or assignment; the corporate goals, roles and responsibilities could be undertaken at that level, and the breakdown of these corporate level goals into smaller and smaller goals and the final allocation of responsibility to individual employees did not conflict; the higher order goals were set then the lower order objectives were also set. The relationships of all internal and external stakeholders would be strengthened right across the institution and between the institution and external stakeholders; they would all view the institution as theirs and collectively work towards its success.

The findings of the study resonate with the findings of a study carried out by Sekhar Bhattacharyya, (2019), who advocated the integration of the strategic planning activities with those activities undertaken in the performance management function.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The conclusion was that the strategic planning process, which was the first leg of a three-legged process of strategic management, could and must be integrated with the performance management process. There were a variety of strategies through which the integration could be successfully achieved. The major strategy was to include the operational staff in the strategic planning process, and this enabled a seamless articulation of strategic or corporate objectives to be cascaded down to the operational level. The operational staff would, through the process of involvement and participation, accept the objectives as their own and subscribe to the roles and responsibilities cutting across the whole of the institution.

The involvement should be extended to all internal and external stakeholders like the suppliers of input and raw materials, the customers and all those who are, for one reason or the other, related to the institution.

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