Information Systems Strategic Alignment Practices in Kenyan Universities: Assessments of Planning and Implementation

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Abstract

The need for and the level of investment in Information Systems (IS) in organizations have been growing. The value from the investment in IS can be realized by ensuring that there is congruence between organization strategies and IS investments. This is achieved through strategic alignment by ensuring appropriate strategy at the corporate level and well planned implementation and management at project level.

This research was aimed at understanding the strategic alignment practices in Kenyan universities with a focus on public universities. This was achieved by first determining strategic alignment maturity levels of the universities at the corporate and IS project implementation level. Then followed by further detailed investigation to understand and explain the achieved strategic alignment levels and project management practices.

The research adopted a sequential explanatory mixed method approach which involved initial quantitative research using survey questionnaires followed by qualitative research which was predominantly case study. Maximum variation sampling approach was used to select four university cases for phase two qualitative study from the results of six universities in phase one.

Strategic alignment maturity levels were determined using a validated questionnaire instrument based on Luftman’s Strategic Alignment Maturity Model (SAMM) which was used as a guiding theoretical framework. The adopted conceptual approach consided evaluation of both corporate level and IS project implementation level of an organization as important in determining strategic alignment maturity and understanding strategic alignment practices in an organization. Project management practices were also established and comparison made between project management and strategic alignment.

The findings showed that alignment maturity at the IS project implementation level was higher than corporate level and varied among the factors in the two projects and levels within the same university and across the universities.

Kenyan public universities used information systems as business enabler to automate processes such as financial and student management. However, the use of IS as a strategic resource to achieve competitive advantage was minimal. Major factors which affected
strategic alignment included the working relationship between university management and IS management, funding of IS projects, membership of head of ICT in key decision making organs and ICT human resource management. The implementation approach of IS projects also played a key role in determining the overall strategic alignment of the universities. It emerged that for organizations to realize strategic advantage from IS investments, professional project management practices were necessary. The derived instruments can be used by universities to develop strategic alignment maturity levels for self-assessment and benchmarking with other universities. The results can also benefit university regulators who can use to monitor the performance of the universities.