

# Role of Senior Management Support and Leadership in the Strategic Positioning of Newly Chartered Public Universities in Kenya: The Case of Laikipia University

Isaac S. Kosgey (Corresponding author)

Administration, Finance and Development Office, Laikipia University, P.O. Box 1100-20300  
Nyahururu, Kenya

E-mail: isaac\_kosgey@yahoo.co.uk

Abel G. Anyieni

School of Business, Kenyatta University (Nakuru Campus), P.O. Box 21677-00100 GPO, Nairobi, Kenya

E-mail: abelanyieni@gmail.com

Asaneth C. Lagat

Department of Commerce, School of Business, Laikipia University (Naivasha Campus), P.O. Box 659-20117  
Naivasha, Kenya

E-mail: asanethl@yahoo.com

Thomas W. Gakobo

Department of Commerce, School of Business, Laikipia University (Nairobi Campus), 1100-20300  
Nyahururu, Kenya

E-mail: tgakobo@gmail.com

## Abstract

Generally, University education is recognized as necessary for socio-economic and political development of society. With this appreciation, Kenya has invested heavily in expansion of University education in the recent past. However, a major pre-occupation of universities in the country today is how to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in a complex and challenging context of the higher education sector. Universities need to strategically re-position themselves to attract and retain students, win research grants and make optimal use of their resources by striving to be efficient and effective, and engaging in continuous improvement to ensure their survival and sustainability. The role of senior management support and leadership in this is core. However, the support and leadership of senior management in strategic positioning of newly chartered public universities in Kenya has not been documented. Through a cross-sectional survey, this study determined the role of senior management support and leadership in strategic positioning of newly chartered public universities. Results indicate that the University's senior management support was crucial for the execution of strategic objectives of the University. The University's senior management was at the conceptual and strategic levels that guided policy decisions and controlled requisite resources of the University. If the University's senior management leadership skills are good, it can provide competitive advantage but loss if inadequate. Human resource management was one of the most critical elements for the University to respond to environmental factors of competition from other institutions of higher learning. Generally, it was apparent that support and leadership of the University's senior management in the strategic positioning of the University was fairly strong. However, the University's senior management would benefit more from training on soft skills as well as benchmarking with other universities in the country and the region to improve on the quality of their leadership. The findings of this study provide information that managers of newly chartered public universities and policy makers would need in terms of senior management support and leadership to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** Senior management, Strategic positioning, Newly chartered public universities, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Generally, University education is acknowledged as necessary for socio-economic and political development of society. With this appreciation, countries in the East African region and other parts of Africa have continued to heavily invest in the expansion of University education (Ngome, 2003; Kosgey, 2013). In the recent past, Kenya has rapidly expanded its higher education sector, especially in public Universities (CUE, 2014). However, a major pre-occupation of universities in Kenya today is how to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in a complex and challenging context of the higher education sector (Saitoti, 2004; Kosgey et al., 2014). Universities, therefore, need to strategically re-position themselves to attract and retain students, win research grants and make optimal use of their resources by striving to be efficient and effective, and engaging in continuous improvement to ensure their survival and sustainability (Deming, 1982; Laikipia University, 2014).

Positioning is fitting the product or service to one or more segments of the broad market in such a way as to set it meaningfully apart from competition (Kalafatis et al., 2000). Strategic positioning is the positioning of an organization in the future, while taking account of the changing environment and bearing in mind the systematic realization of that positioning (Denning, 2001). It entails the devising of the desired future position of the organization on the basis of present and foreseeable developments, and the creation of plans to achieve that position (Arthur & Strickland, 2003; Gershon, 2003). Strategic positioning is targeted at ensuring the continuity of the organization (Porter, 1980 & 1985; Trout & Rivkin, 2000). In this regard, the leadership of senior management of the organization to a large extent is crucial (Hitt et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2008). It is, therefore, important to generally understand the characteristics of senior management to determine their influence on strategic positioning of the University.

The role of senior management leadership in directing the universities to attain strategic positioning is essential. Leadership is shaping the behaviour of others through influence (Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd., 2007) or is the art of inspiring subordinates to perform their duties willingly, competently and enthusiastically (Collins & Chou, 2013; Ezigbo, 2013; Nikolic & Robinson, 2013). It is that relationship through which one person influences the behaviour of others towards the achievement of a common objective (Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd., 2007). Consequently, a leader becomes one who, by example and talent, plays a directing role and commands influence over others (Lunenburg, 2012). Simply, leadership could be described as getting others to follow or getting others to do things willingly. In management, leadership can be seen as the use of authority in decision making, and can be exercised as an attitude of position, or because of personal knowledge and wisdom, or as a function of personality (Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd., 2007; Lunenburg, 2012).

To attain competitive advantage of an organization, the leadership, more especially the top management, should perform two major functions (Luthans, 2005; Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd., 2007): Firstly, they should create a strategic imperative acting in unison to showcase the need for change and involving middle managers in the choice of projects. Secondly, they should manage the organization context by choosing project leaders who are likely to be successful while being able to balance power and monitoring of the projects, providing protection to the teams and managing the expectations of the rest of the organization. According to Congden (2005), the roles of leadership in attaining competitive advantage include; teaching while learning, enforcing strategic consistency, oversight of the process and focus on key questions. For instance, the key questions leaders should ask before investing in a new venture include; do market characteristics justify the need? Is the project technically feasible? Is it easy for an organization to implement? Characteristics of leaders who can create competitive advantage include; credibility within the organization, well-honed tactical and implementation skills, sound knowledge of the organization and people within it, and good relationship with the middle managers across the organization and other stakeholders (Congden, 2005; Lunenburg, 2012; Kosgey, 2013). However, studies hardly exist on the role of senior management support and leadership in strategic positioning of newly chartered public universities in Kenya. The current study, therefore, focused on the role of senior management support and leadership in the strategic positioning of newly chartered public universities in Kenya, with specific reference to Laikipia University.

## **2. Research Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey was undertaken at Laikipia University in Kenya, in which primary data was collected using sets of pre-tested structured and unstructured questionnaires from 22 senior management employees (i.e., Top management, Deans/ Directors, Chairpersons/ Heads of Departments/ Sections and Co-ordinators) of the University out of a sample frame of 44. Further, a sample of 102 teaching and administrative employees (Grades V-XIV) from a sample frame of 205 employees in that category in the University was interviewed to get opinions on the role of the University's senior management support in the strategic positioning of the University. The sample picked for the study was about 50.0% of the target population, which was higher than the 30% recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) for such studies.

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected, emphasising on the full analysis of the role of senior management support and leadership in strategic positioning of the University. Secondary data was obtained from records and documents in the University offices. General statistics were used to describe the results, and correlation analyses done to establish the effect of employee capacity on strategic positioning of the University. The results are presented in tabular summaries.

## **3. Research Results**

### *3.1 General Characteristics of Senior Management of the University*

The general characteristics of the survey respondents from senior management of the University are presented in Table 1 below. Males dominated (72.7%) the senior management of the University. Those married were the majority (86.4%) and the age category of 46-55 years was predominant (40.9%), with the least (9.1%) being 31-35 years. Most (40.9%) of the survey respondents from senior management of the University had doctorate

degrees and the least (9.1%) diploma. Majority of them were administrators in specialized fields, e.g., catering, medical, transport, procurement and security, followed by associate professors (27.3%), and the least (9.1%) being senior lecturers. Most (81.8%) of the senior management of the University survey respondents were permanent and pensionable in employment. The chairpersons and heads of departments/ sections were the majority (45.5%) while the top management constituted about 13.6% of the respondents. The survey respondents who had over 16 years in University employment were predominant (50.0%).

Table 1. General characteristics of respondents from senior management of Laikipia University

Variable	Aspect	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	16	72.7
	Female	6	27.3
	Total	22	100.0
Marital status	Single	3	13.6
	Married	19	86.4
	Total	22	100.0
Age (years)	31-35	2	9.1
	36-45	8	36.4
	46-55	9	40.9
	56-65	3	13.6
	Total	22	100.0
Highest level of education	Diploma	2	9.1
	First degree	3	13.6
	Masters	8	36.4
	Doctorate	9	40.9
	Total	22	100.0
Position/ Rank	Associate Professor	6	27.3
	Senior Lecturer	2	9.1
	Administrator in professional field	14	63.6
	Total	22	100.0
Terms of employment	Permanent and Pensionable	18	81.8
	Contract	4	18.2
	Total	22	100.0
Role in the University	Top Management	3	13.6
	Dean/ Director	6	27.3
	Chairman/ Head of Department	10	45.5
	Other	3	13.6
	Total	22	100.0
Experience in University service (years)	1-5	7	31.8
	6-10	2	9.1
	11-15	2	9.1
	≥16	11	50.0
	Total	22	100.0

### 3.2 Senior Management Leadership and the Workplace in the University

Table 2 below indicates opinions of the senior management survey respondents on senior management leadership and the workplace in the University while Table 3 shows the means, modes, medians and standard deviations of their responses. Majority (53.5%) of the survey respondents agreed that senior management believed in the vision and mission of the University. This was supported by a mean value of 2.1, a mode value of 2 and a median value of 2 (Table 3). Most (68.2%) of the respondents also agreed that the University's senior management leadership inspired stakeholders to attain the vision and mission of the University. Similarly, majority of the survey respondents agreed that the University's senior management leadership believed in the core values (50.0%) and the strategic objectives (59.1%) of the University.

Table 2. Opinions of the University's senior management survey respondents on senior management leadership and the workplace at Laikipia University

Variable	Frequency (f)/ Percentage (%)	Degree of agreement					Total
		Strongly agreed	Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	
Leadership believed in the University's vision and mission	<i>f</i>	5.0	12.0	4.0	1.0	0.0	22.0
	%	22.7	54.5	18.2	4.5	0.0	100.0
Leadership inspired stakeholders to attain the University's vision and mission	<i>f</i>	1.0	15.0	1.0	2.0	3.0	22.0
	%	4.5	68.2	4.5	9.1	13.6	100.0
Leadership believed in the University's core values	<i>f</i>	4.0	11.0	5.0	1.0	1.0	22.0
	%	18.2	50.0	22.7	4.5	4.5	100.0
Leadership believed in the University's strategic objectives	<i>f</i>	3.0	13.0	4.0	1.0	1.0	22.0
	%	13.6	59.1	18.2	4.5	4.5	100.0

Table 3. Means, modes, medians and standard deviations (SD) of opinions of the University's senior management survey respondents on senior management leadership and the workplace at Laikipia University (n=22)

Variable	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
Leadership believed in the University's vision and mission	2.1	2	2	0.9
Leadership inspired stakeholders to attain the University's vision and mission	2.6	2	2	1.2
Leadership believed in the University's core values	2.3	2	2	1.0
Leadership believed in the University's strategic objectives	2.3	2	2	0.9

Table 4 indicates opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the leadership of the University's senior management and the workplace at the University while Table 5 gives the means, modes, medians and standard deviations of their responses. Majority of the survey respondents agreed that they received full and constructive feedback from their supervisors (36.2%) and had the opportunity to participate in the University's goal setting process (39.2%). Further, most (36.3%) of them agreed that employee performance evaluation was fair and appropriate. Correspondingly, about 45.1%, 40.2% and 45.1 % of the survey respondents also agreed that employee performance standards in the University were high, that supervisors gave them praise and recognition when they did a good job and that senior management guided activities that ensured improved employee performance (Table 4). Respectively, about 28.4% and 41.2% of the respondents, however, disagreed that everybody was treated fairly at the University and that senior management shared their daily experiences with employees. Additionally, majority (26.5%) of the respondents agreed, were not sure and disagreed on the aspect of poor employee performance being addressed throughout the University. Most of the respondents agreed that the University's senior management was held accountable for achieving results (40.8%) and that job performance was measured to ensure all employee were achieving the University's goals (41.2%).

Table 4. Opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the University's senior management leadership and the workplace at Laikipia University

Variable	Frequency (f)/ Percentage (%)	Degree of agreement					Total
		Strongly agreed	Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	
I receive full and constructive feedback from my supervisor	f	21	62	4	9	6	102
	%	7.8	36.2	22.5	26.5	6.9	100.0
I have an opportunity to participate in the University's goal setting process	f	13	40	7	27	15	102
	%	12.7	39.2	6.9	26.5	14.7	100.0
Employee performance evaluations were fair and appropriate	f	8	37	23	27	7	102
	%	7.8	36.3	22.5	26.5	6.9	100.0
Employee performance standards were high	f	11	46	14	27	4	102
	%	10.8	45.1	13.7	26.5	3.9	100.0
My supervisor gives me praise and recognition when I do a good job	f	20	41	3	28	10	102
	%	19.6	40.2	2.9	27.5	9.8	100.0
Senior management guided activities that ensured improved employee performance	f	10	46	15	18	13	102
	%	9.8	45.1	14.7	17.6	12.7	100.0

Table 5: Means, modes, medians and the standard deviations (SD) of opinions of teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the University's senior management leadership support and the workplace at Laikipia University (n=102)

Variable	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
I receive full and constructive feedback from my supervisor	2.2	2	2	1.1
I have an opportunity to participate in the University's goal setting process	2.2	2	2	1.3
Employee performance evaluations were fair and appropriate	2.9	2	3	1.1
Employee performance standards were high	2.7	2	2	1.1
My supervisor gives me praise and recognition when I do a good job	2.7	2	2	1.3
Senior management guided activities that ensured improved employee performance	2.8	2	2	1.2
Everybody was treated fairly at the University	3.5	4	4	1.2
Senior management shared daily experiences with employees	3.7	4	4	1.1
Poor employee performance was effectively addressed throughout the University	3.1	2	3	1.2
Senior management was held accountable for achieving results	2.7	2	2	1.2
Job performance was measured to ensure all staff were achieving the University's goals	2.7	2	2	1.1

### 3.3 Commitment of the University's Senior Management Leadership

Table 6 below shows opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the University's senior management commitment to managing the affairs of the University while Table 7 gives the means, modes, medians and standard deviations of the responses. Majority (33.0%) of the survey respondents agreed that the University's senior management leadership recognized its duty as being to enhance performance of the workforce. Further, most (38.2%) of them agreed that the University's senior management leadership was loyal to ensuring that improved employee performance was achieved. Moreover, about 29.0% of the survey respondents agreed that the University's senior management leadership believed in continuous improvement in

employee performance. However, a relatively large proportion (28.4%) disagreed that the University's policies for promotion and advancement were always adhered to.

Table 6. Opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the University's senior management commitment to managing the affairs of Laikipia University

Variable	Frequency (f)/ Percentage (%)	Degree of agreement					Total
		Strongly agreed	Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	
Senior management recognized that it was its duty to enhance performance of the University's workforce	f	27	33	15	23	4	102
	%	26.5	32.4	14.7	22.5	3.9	100.0
Senior management was loyal to ensuring that improved employee performance was achieved	f	12	39	20	20	11	102
	%	11.8	38.2	19.6	19.6	10.8	100.0
Senior management believed in continuous improvement in employee performance	f	24	30	19	18	11	102
	%	23.5	29.4	18.6	17.6	10.8	100.0
The University's policies for promotion and advancement were always adhered to	f	8	20	25	29	20	102
	%	7.8	19.6	24.3	28.4	19.6	100.0

Table 7. Means, modes, medians and the standard deviations (SD) of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the University's senior management commitment to managing the affairs of Laikipia University (n=102)

Variable	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
Senior management recognized that it was its duty to enhance performance of the workforce	2.0	2	2.0	1.2
Senior management was loyal to ensuring that improved employee performance was achieved	2.8	2	2.5	1.2
Senior management believed in continuous improvement in employee performance	2.6	2	2.0	1.3
The University's policies for promotion and advancement were always adhered to	3.3	4	3.0	1.2

### 3.4 Provision of Requisite Resources at the Workplace by Senior Management

Table 8 below indicates opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the provision of resources at the workplace by senior management of the University while Table 9 gives the means, modes, medians and standard deviations of their responses. Majority of the survey respondents disagreed that they had the requisite resources to undertake their jobs well (42.2%), that facilities and equipment required for their work were regularly serviced (45.1%) and that senior management provided enough employees to perform required tasks (51.0%). Further, most of the respondents disagreed that senior management provided sufficient information and knowledge to undertake required tasks effectively (39.7%), that the necessary information systems were in place and were accessible to them to do their jobs effectively (39.2%) and that Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) operations were effective and efficient (37.3%). Additionally, majority of the respondents disagreed that the University had adequate numbers of employees in various cadres (50.0%) and that their workplace was well maintained and physically comfortable to work in (36.3%). Conversely, majority of the respondents agreed that their workplace was safe and secure (38.2%), that the environment at the University supported a balance between work and family (45.1%), that the amount of work they were asked to do was reasonable (53.9%), and that modern and current technology was used at the University (38.2%). Further, most of the respondents agreed that the University had protection for unauthorized access and manipulation of records and information (34.3%), and that their co-workers cared about them personally (51.0%).

Table 8. Opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on provision of requisite resources

by the University's senior management at the workplace at Laikipia University

Variable	Frequency ( <i>f</i> )/ Percentage (%)	Degree of agreement					Total
		Strongly agreed	Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed	
Resources I needed to do my job well were available	<i>f</i>	3	18	6	43	32	102
	%	2.9	17.6	5.9	42.2	31.4	100.0
Facilities and equipment required for my work were regularly serviced	<i>f</i>	3	15	13	46	25	102
	%	2.9	14.7	12.7	45.1	24.5	100.0
Senior management provided enough employees required to perform required tasks	<i>f</i>	3	12	12	52	23	102
	%	2.9	11.8	11.8	51.	22.5	100.0
Senior management provided sufficient information and knowledge to undertake required tasks effectively	<i>f</i>	3	30	14	40	14	102
	%	3.9	29.4	13.7	39.7	13.7	100.0
The necessary information systems were in place and accessible for me to do my job effectively	<i>f</i>	4	30	14	40	14	102
	%	3.9	29.4	13.7	39.2	13.7	100.0
My workplace was well maintained and physically comfortable to work in	<i>f</i>	8	30	7	37	20	102
	%	7.8	29.4	6.9	36.3	19.6	100.0
My workplace was safe and secure	<i>f</i>	7	39	9	29	18	102
	%	6.9	38.2	8.8	28.4	17.6	100.0
The environment in the University supported a balance between work and family	<i>f</i>	10	46	15	20	11	102
	%	9.8	45.1	14.7	19.6	10.8	100.0
The amount of work I am asked to do was reasonable	<i>f</i>	12	55	5	21	9	102
	%	4.8	53.9	4.9	20.6	8.8	100.0
There was use of modern and current technology	<i>f</i>	3	39	15	29	16	102
	%	2.9	38.2	14.7	28.4	15.7	100.0
ICT operations were effective and efficient	<i>f</i>	3	19	15	38	27	102
	%	2.9	18.6	14.7	37.3	26.5	100.0
The University had adequate number of employees in various cadres	<i>f</i>	0	11	18	51	22	102
	%	0	10.8	17.6	50.0	21.6	100.0
The University had protection for unauthorized access and manipulation of records and information	<i>f</i>	7	35	21	27	12	102
	%	6.9	34.3	20.6	26.5	11.8	100.0
My co-workers cared about me as a person	<i>f</i>	19	52	18	9	4	102
	%	18.6	51.0	17.6	8.8	3.9	100.0

Table 9. Means, modes, medians and standard deviations (SD) of opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on provision of requisite resources at the workplace by the University's senior management at Laikipia University (n=102)

Variable	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
Resources I needed to do my job well were available	3.8	4	4	1.2
Facilities and equipment required for my work were regularly serviced	3.7	4	4	1.1
Senior management provided enough staff required to perform required tasks	3.8	4	4	1.0
Senior management provided sufficient information and knowledge to undertake required tasks effectively	3.2	2	3	1.1
The necessary information systems were in place and accessible for me to do my job effectively	3.3	4	4	1.2
My workplace was well maintained and physically comfortable to work in	3.3	4	4	1.3
My workplace was safe and secure	3.1	2	3	1.3
The environment at the University supported a balance between work and family	3.8	2	2	1.2
The amount of work I am asked to do was reasonable	2.6	2	2	1.2
There was use of modern and current technology	3.2	2	4	1.2
ICT operations were effective and efficient	3.7	4	4	1.2
The University had adequate number of employees in various cadres	3.8	4	4	0.9
The University had protection for unauthorized access and manipulation of records and information	3.0	2	3	1.2
My co-workers cared about me personally	2.3	2	2	0.1

### 3.5 Teamwork in the University

Table 10 below gives opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on teamwork in the University while Table 11 presents the means, modes, medians and standard deviations of their responses. Majority of the survey respondents agreed that teamwork was encouraged and practiced (44.1%), and that there was a strong feeling of teamwork and cooperation (34.3%) in the University. However, most of them disagreed that all major University events were adequately communicated to employees (36.3%), and that employee job satisfaction was a priority of senior management (43.1%).

Table 10. Opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on teamwork at Laikipia University

Variable	Frequency (f)/ Percentage (%)	Degree of agreement					Total
		Strongly agreed	agreed	Not sure	disagreed	Strongly disagreed	
Teamwork was encouraged and practiced at the University	f	19	45	14	18	6	102
	%	18.6	44.1	13.7	17.6	5.9	100.0
There was a strong feeling of teamwork and cooperation at the University	f	18	35	20	22	7	102
	%	17.6	34.3	19.6	21.6	6.9	100.0
All major University events were adequately communicated to employees	f	5	32	14	37	14	102
	%	4.9	31.4	13.7	36.3	13.7	100.0
Employee job satisfaction was a priority of senior management	f	7	16	16	44	19	102
	%	6.9	15.7	15.7	43.1	18.6	100.0



Table 11. Means, modes, medians and the standard deviations (SD) of the opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on teamwork at Laikipia University (n=102)

Variable	Mean	Mode	Median	SD
Teamwork was encouraged and practiced at the University	2.5	2	2	1.2
There was a strong feeling of teamwork and cooperation at the University	2.7	2	2	1.2
All major University events were adequately communicated to employees	3.2	4	3	1.2
Employee job satisfaction was a priority of senior management	3.5	4	4	1.2

#### 4. Discussions

The purpose of the current study was to establish the role of senior management support and leadership on the strategic positioning of newly-chartered public universities in Kenya, with specific reference to Laikipia University. The findings can, however, be generalized across all similar universities in the country. The findings relating to gender representation indicated that males were predominant in senior management of the University, an observation similar to that of Manyasi *et al.* (2011) for public universities in Kenya. As expected, those married were more than the singles and most of them were over 45 of years of age, implying, as evidenced, that most senior members of the University's senior management had long experience in their work. This was corroborated by the fact that majority of them had masters degrees or were administrators in specialized fields, and in permanent and pensionable employment.

The findings relating to senior management leadership and the workplace at the University showed that the University's senior management believed in the vision and mission of the University and that the University's senior management leadership inspired stakeholders to attain the vision and mission of the University. Besides, the findings point to the University's senior management leadership belief in the core values and the strategic objectives of the University. This means that senior management leadership played a key role in rallying support for the strategic positioning of the University. The observations relating to opinions of the teaching and administrative staff survey respondents on the leadership of the University's senior management indicated that employees received full and constructive feedback from their supervisors, and that they had the opportunity to participate in the University's goal setting process. Additionally, employee performance evaluations were fair and appropriate and employee performance standards in the University were high, with supervisors giving staff praise and recognition when they performed well in their duties. Senior management also guided activities that ensured improved employee performance in the University. The foregoing demonstrated good support from the University's senior management to employees and their good leadership, characteristics that would auger well in the strategic positioning of the University (Lunenburg, 2012; Collins & Chou, 2013; Nikolic & Robinson, 2013).

Fair treatment of employees at the University was deemed to be wanting although the University's senior management shared daily experiences with employees, were accountable for achieving desired results, and facilitated measurement of job performance to ensure that all employees were achieving organizational goals. The findings concur with those of Kosgey *et al.* (2014) that employee capacity was important for strategic positioning of the University. Therefore, the University's senior management needs to enhance fair treatment of all employees to avoid disgruntlement that could compromise the strategic positioning of the University. The findings relating to the commitment of the University's senior management indicated that senior management recognized it was its duty to enhance performance of the workforce and was loyal to ensuring that improved employee performance was achieved. Moreover, the University's senior management believed in continuous improvement in employee performance. The preceding are essential ingredients of strategic positioning of the University (Luthans, 2005; Hitt *et al.*, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2008). However, there was need for the University's senior management to always adhere to the University's policies for promotion and career advancement.

The findings relating to opinions of the survey respondents on the provision of resources at the workplace by senior management of the University indicated that the requisite resources to undertake their jobs well were available, that facilities and equipment required to perform required tasks were regularly serviced, and that enough employees to perform desired tasks were provided. These are favourable support provisions that would enhance strategic positing of the University (Congden, 2005). However, the University's senior management needed to provide sufficient information and knowledge as well put in place necessary information systems that were accessible for employees to enable them to do their jobs effectively. These reflected immense support from the University's senior management that was necessary for strategic positioning of the University.

The findings relating to ICT operations indicated that these were effective and efficient. The University had adequate number of employees in various cadres and the workplace was well maintained and physically comfortable to work in. This was confirmed by majority of the survey respondents that their

workplace was safe and secure, and that the environment in the University supported a balance between work and family. Additionally, the amount of work employees were asked to do was reasonable, and that modern and current technology was used in the University. These demonstrated adequate senior management support for strategic positioning of the University. It was also gratifying that the University's senior management had protection for unauthorized access and manipulation of records and information, and that co-workers of most employees cared about them personally.

The findings relating to teamwork suggested that this was encouraged and practiced at the University. This was demonstrated by the strong feeling of teamwork and cooperation at the University. However, effort was needed to ensure that all major University events were adequately communicated to employees. A study in a university set up by Lagat et al. (2014) reported that timely delivery of information to employees positively and significantly affected organizational layout and working conditions. It has been observed that employee job satisfaction was important for strategic positioning of a university (Kosgey et al., 2014). Generally, employee job satisfaction was observed to enjoy fairly good priority from the University's senior management, a point that was favourable for strategic positioning of the University.

To enhance success of strategic positioning, the University's senior management would benefit more from training on soft skills to improve on quality of their leadership. To achieve this, the survey respondents recommended continuous training and exposure through short courses, sensitization workshops and seminars on leadership skills, and insistence on measurable output. Further, sponsorship of the University's senior management to attend professional management courses was deemed necessary as well as benchmarking with other universities in the country and the region on leadership skills. It was also advisable to have regular meetings between the University's senior management and employees to enhance communication within the University. Further, it was felt that the University's senior management should treat and consider all its internal stakeholders indiscriminately in all respects just like the external stakeholders. Formulating guidance and communicating intent to staff and team leaders is critical to operational success. Well-defined guidance and intent empowers employees to do things needed to get the job done at the tactical level. To empower tactical actions that achieve objectives, a leader must make and communicate decisions faster than the situation changes (Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd., 2007; Collins & Chou, 2013; Nikolic & Robinson, 2013).

Staff motivation, based not solely on academic papers, but also on performance and experience was suggested by the survey respondents as likely to further contribute to strategic positioning of the University. Recognition of exemplary employee performance and long service to the University was also indicated by the survey respondents to be desirable. The foregoing concur with the findings of Mohammed et al. (2014), that an organizational leadership should recognize the needs of the workers, employ appropriate motivational tools such as promotion of employees based on merit and relevant skills, provision of a suitable working environment and application of an appropriate leadership style that would encourage free flow of information among organizational leaders and the employees.

There was also need for proper coordination of University activities and functions, and policies governing issues and operations of the University to assist in strategic positioning of the University. Additionally, the teaching and administrative employees felt that there was need to increase market-driven academic programmes to boost the University's strategic positioning. The University's senior management needed to champion training of employees, set up a marketing and publication unit, and benchmark with other universities in its products and services. Support for co-curricular activities was regarded as effective for marketing of the University. Additionally, sourcing for more funding for the core activities of the University was felt to be imperative from the University's senior management to attain competitive advantage for the University. Expansion of ICT to all departments and offices was cited by most survey respondents as crucial requirements. It was also apparent that there was shortage of employees in most departments, which sometimes led to employee overload. Specifically, teaching staff were inadequate and it was recommended that more should be recruited, especially at senior lecturer level and above.

It was evident in the current study that support and leadership of senior management of the University was essential for sustainable competitive advantage of the University. Senior management is at the conceptual and strategic levels that guided policy decisions and controlled resources of the University. Senior management also determined behaviour in the workplace. If senior management leadership skills are good, it can provide competitive advantage but loss if inadequate (Lunenburg, 2012; Mohammed et al., 2014). However, to define an end state that equals success, leaders at all levels must understand the intent and objectives of the leaders above them. Each leader must overlay that understanding onto the current situation and available resources. The leader can then determine what success ought to look like (Mission-Centered Solutions, Inc. Ltd, 2007; Lunenburg, 2012; Mohammed et al., 2014).

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

It was evident in the current study that support and leadership of the University's senior management was

essential for sustainable competitive advantage of the University. The University's senior management was at the conceptual and strategic levels that guided policy decisions and controlled resources of the University. That is, senior management determined execution of strategic objectives through provision of the requisite resources and guidance for strategic positioning of the University. Senior management also determined behaviour in the workplace. It, therefore, emerged that human resource management was one of the most critical elements for the University to respond to environmental factors of competition from other institutions of higher learning and, subsequently, have an edge in strategic positioning. If the University's senior management leadership skills are good, it can provide competitive advantage but loss if inadequate. Generally, it was apparent that the support and leadership of the University's senior management in the strategic positioning of the University was fairly strong. However, the University's senior management would benefit more from training on soft skills as well as benchmarking with other universities in the country and the region to improve on the quality of their leadership. It is important to note that further research is required to understand the role of external stakeholders and students in strategic positioning of the University. Additionally, a comparative study of all newly chartered public and private universities in Kenya to understand the strategies they are employing to position themselves in the face of intense competition for students and scarce resources to ensure their long-term survival in the university training services value-chain would be essential. The findings of this study provide information that managers of newly chartered public universities and policy makers would need in terms of senior management support and leadership to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

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