

Assessment of Factor Affecting Institutional Performance: The Case of Wolaita Sodo University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that affect institutional performance of Wolaita Sodo University. The study has identified middle level manager's perceptions toward institutional performance to indicate the key factors that seem to affect the performance of the university. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and interview. The collected data were analyzed using simple quantitative analysis. The finding of the study revealed that factors that influencing the institutional performance are leadership experience, academic rank of the managers, applied policy and procedures, making professional learning community and ensuring efficient financial management and accountability. Finally, recommendations were forwarded based on the major finding in order to improve Institutional performance like as officials should updates its policies and proceduresthrough participation of the whole community, professional pathways should include professional learning priorities, financial resource allocation and distribution should be made to each unit in accordance with aligned work and activities, accessing training regarding educational leadership and promoting the staff to engaged in research and community service and publish on reputable journals.

Keywords: Institutional performance, leadership, Wolaita Sodo University

1. Introduction

Higher education in Ethiopia has a relatively short history of some 60 years only, but during the past ten years it has undergone both major quantitative and qualitative change. A succession of new policies was designed and implemented, with the Education and Training Policy (1994) being the first major framework for systems reform and transformation. The policy stressed issues of quality and relevance in educational programs and emphasized the linkage of higher education and the country's development.

Given a competitive environment marked by decreasing resources, the findings suggest that universities, whether public or private, will continue to pursue strategies and policies that will favor entrepreneurial activities with clear revenue implications as well as attracting top students in an effort to increase institutional performance. The need for further research into institutional factors and performance models is identified as well as the need for comprehensive institutional data. The concept of policy alignment is introduced as a way to cope with demands at all levels of policy (Jose G. Alcaine, 2016).

Given the complexities, hyper-competition, and constrained resources active in the higher education environment, this study examines factors that influence institutional performance inconsideration of performance indicators of institutional quality assurance policy and some other relevant variables targeting wolaita Sodo university middle level managers.

Organizational Performance

According to Chen, et al. (2006), organizational performance means the "transformation of inputs into outputs for achieving certain outcomes. With regard to its content, performance informs about the relation between minimal and effective cost (economy), between effective cost and realized output (efficiency) and between output and achieved the outcome (effectiveness)".

According to Bolman & Deal (2003), DeClerk (2008) and Scott & Davis (2015), there is no general agreement in the literature on the standards to be used in measuring the organizational performance. However, there are four main dominant approaches: Goal Approach. People create organizations for a specific purpose which is determined by the stakeholders. The organizational performance is the ability of the organization to achieve its goals.

The System Resource Approach. This approach discovers the relation between the organization and the environment. As said by Cutler et al. (2003) an organization is effective when it takes advantage of its environment in the attainment of high value and rare resources to approve its operations.

Constituency Approach. According to Agle, et al. (2006), an organization is effective when multiple

stakeholders perceive the organization as effective. The organizations with more control over resources are likely to have the most influence on the performance (Scott, Davis, 2007).

Competing Values Approach. It was developed by Cameron and Quinn (2006) and it states that organizational goals are created in different ways by the various expectations of multiple districts.

Therefore, organizations may have different criteria to measure performance. According to Cameron, et al. (2014), stakeholders support the adaptability of their organizations, they want them to be flexible, stable and effective. According to Cohen & Bradford (2005), a performant and effective organization has a high degree of collaboration and commitment among stakeholders through work groups and management.

Leadership role on institution performance

Van and Field (1990) point out and argue that the leadership role requires attention to individuals and organizations. Essentially, we see him (the leader) filling the gap between subordinate desires and abilities on one hand and organizational goals and requirements on the other. In essence, when the gap is filled, there should be satisfied subordinates in a high performance organization. Conger (1992) further goes into depth and stated that Leaders are individuals who establish direction for a working group of individuals who gain commitment from this group of members to this direction and who then motivate these members to achieve the direction's outcomes. A leader, Apps (1994) for instance, is ordinarily understood to be a prominent and active person. All leaders together are the leadership Asbaugh and Kasten (1995) that viewed in relation to the individual.

Even though there are differences between definitions, two characteristics of leadership can be observed; leadership is related to the process of influencing others behavior, it is also related to goals development and achievement. leadership is the initiative of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization's goals and objectives or for changing an organization's goals and objectives (Lipham, 1981); a process in which some values, needs and aspirations of both leader and followers are taken care of while acting for achieving certain goals (Bass, 1990); to achieve some goals a leader may direct the activities towards it or may initiate an action among people for a specific purpose (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990). Searching for the one and only proper and true definition of leadership seems to be fruitless (Bass, 1990).

Leadership is not an attribute of the personality but a quality of his role within a particular or specified social system. Chemers (1997) advises to concentrate on leadership acts rather than on leaders. Cohen (1990) suggests Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective or project. The leader affects the group by initiating action, facilitating communication, establishing structure and implementing his own philosophy in the manner in which he leads. According to Combs, Miser and Whitaker (1999) leaders show responsibility and authority while planning, initiating, managing, delegating, coordinating, decision-making, communicating and evaluating. In solving any particular problem, a principal might use one or several of these acts of leadership.

University performance evaluation

According to literature, university performance evaluation is achieved through: typical Evaluation, focusing a) in the quality of a subject in all study programs that the subject is taught (for example, the subject "total quality management" in a business administration study programme), b) in the study programme, c) in the quality of an institution in every aspect of each operation (for example, educational or administrative) and d) the quality of a specific theme, that is a practice within higher education (for example students' summer training programme in organizations) (DEI, 2003).

Accreditation is the procedure by which a private or a state-independent actor evaluates the quality of an institution or a study programme with the view to certify that it meets specific and pre-defined standards (Vlasceanu et al., 2004). The result of the accreditation procedure will provide the awarding of a status, a recognition or a license for operation for a certain period of time. It may include an initial self-study and external evaluation by experts. Its main objective is to maintain and improve quality in a higher education institution, study programme or course (Di Nauta et al., 2004).

Audit: It is the process by which it is examined if the mechanisms and procedures that assure quality within an evaluation unit are present, are functioning properly and are effective. It focuses on the accountability and examines whether the stated objectives are being achieved. The reasons for quality audit include the evaluation of performance of quality assurance systems and quality monitoring procedures, the assurance that units are responsible for quality, the initiation of improvements in the priority setting procedure and the facilitation of decision making. It also helps towards learning and improvement along with university accountability (Hämäläinen et al., 2001; Vlasceanu et al., 2004).

Benchmarking: According to Vlasceanu et al., (2004), benchmarking is a systematic method to collect and present information regarding the performance of organizational units and allow comparisons with the aim to establishing best practices, identifying performance weaknesses and strong points. Benchmarking is a diagnostic, self-assessment and learning tool at the same time, while on the other hand it constitutes a dynamic process of learning and performance comparison (Epper, 1999). Benchmarking may be internal, external competitive, external collaborative, external cross sectional and implicit and its methodology can be based on an

excellence model, be horizontal or vertical or even be based on specific performance indicators sets (Alstete, 1995). Its main idea is to supply the institutional administration with an external reference point or a standard to evaluate quality or the cost of internal activities, practices and procedures (Hämäläinen et.al, 2002).

2. Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was quantitative research and aimed to find the factors that affect institutional performance of the University based on their own perception of middle level managers. In order to reduce the raw data obtained to a more meaningful form and identify the perception of middle level managers, a descriptive survey method was employed.

Data Sources

Sources of data for this study were college/school deans, department heads and coordinators in the university under consideration. Accordingly, all college/school deans, department heads and coordinators in the eight colleges/schools participated in this study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The university has ten colleges/schools among then eight, namely college of engineering, natural and computational science, business and economics, social science and humanity, agriculture, school of education and behavioral science, veterinary medicine, school of public health, college of medicine and health science, and school of law in the main campus. Accordingly, except the School of Public Health and college of medicine and health science, all department heads in the rest of eight colleges/schools and coordinators from each college/school were included in the study. The above two schools and colleges were excluded because it was used for pilot testing of the instrument. There are 36 Departments in the 8 colleges and 24 coordinators in the entire school/collage of main campus. Accordingly, among 36 Departments in the 8 colleges and 24 coordinators in the entire school/collage of main campus, 33 department, 7 college and 21 coordinators, who are volunteer for the study were included.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Data was collected using the Institutional Quality Assurance Policy guideline. Thus, standard questionnaire was developed to assess the relationship between standards and institutional performance of Wolaita Sodo University, which has been developed by consulting various experiences of higher education institutions at national level(IQAP, 2014). In addition to the guideline standard, a demographic survey instrument called the personal information data sheet was also included in the survey packet to collect information relating to the respondent's years of service, leadership experience, their current position, academic rank, training access related with leadership, and name of the college/school. The policy guideline consists of 11 focus areas those are thematic representations of related activities and more standards that means a goal statement that identifies a desired performance (IQAP, 2014). The respondents were expected to select the answer that most closely matches how they perceive they would typically respond in a given situation. The focus area selected for this study were further described including expected standards and detailed performance indicators. Thus, it was collected from the respondents through closed-ended structured questionnaire using five level rating scales of performance indicator. The Rating Scales for all Indicators are Unsatisfactory, satisfactory, Good, Very Good and Excellent (where 1= unsatisfactory and 5= Excellent). The reliability of the instrument was maintained in such a way that it was pilot tested on School of Public Health and college of medicine and health science before it was employed for the actual data collection purpose. Accordingly, the coefficients of reliability of items measuring all variables are found to be Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha > 0.60$. According to Gay (1980), if reliability coefficient, greater than 0.50, then, it can be accepted as reliable instrument. The items were, therefore, found to have good ground to be used in gathering the relevant data for the study.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained through standard questionnaire and a demographic survey instrument was analyzed using statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 20.0. The data were analyzed by descriptive like calculating the frequency, percentage and regression analysis.

3. Result and Discussions

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by Current Position

Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Department Head	28	45.9
Coordinator	27	44.3
Dean	6	9.8
Total	61	100

As previously explain among 66 expected respondents which are currently active in the entire position

in the university as Dean, Coordinator and Head for departments, a total of 61 volunteer respondents were participated in our studies. Among them 90% are heads and coordinators.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by College/School

Colleges/Schools	Frequency	Percentage
School of Law	4	6.6
School of Veterinary Medicine	3	4.9
School of Education and Behavioral Science	6	9.8
College of Business and Economics	7	11.5
College of natural and Computational Science	9	14.8
College of Agriculture	11	18.0
CSSH	12	19.7
College of Engineering	9	14.8
Total	61	100

Result from the above table revealed that most of the respondents were from college of social science and humanity, and agriculture. Whereas, the rest were from college of engineering, natural and computational science, business and economics, and from school of education and behavioral science, veterinary medicine and law, respectively.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by Work Experience

Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5	29	47.5
6 – 10	27	44.3
>11	5	8.2
Total	61	100

The above table indicates the work experience of middle level managers within and outside the university in general. The number of respondents having 0-5 years of work experience was 29, respondents of 6-10 years' experience were 27 and the number of respondent having 11 and more years of experience was 5. This shows that the majority of the respondent (85.2 %) were having less than and equals to 5 years of leadership experience.

Table 4. Result of Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.251	1.085		.231	.818
Leadership experience	.068	.026	.280	2.582	.013
Education level	.132	.404	.037	.328	.744
Academic rank	.312	.182	.225	1.712	.093
There were shared vision and value	.033	.103	.041	.323	.748
Policy and procedures are in place	.224	.123	.291	1.816	.076
Future trend and direction identified	.006	.118	.008	.054	.957
The university made professional learning community	.194	.112	.238	1.731	.090
There were effective communication channel	.097	.113	.116	.855	.397
The university ensure efficient finance management & accountability	.276	.113	.357	2.437	.018
The university ensure efficient purchase	.130	.104	.163	1.254	.216
The university ensure efficient property management	.032	.107	.034	.296	.769

Dependent Variable: Institution performance
Number of Observations 61
R 0.77
R² 0.59
Significance level 0.000

Table 5. Distribution of respondent's perception toward overall performance

Leadership Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Unsatisfactory	1	1.6
Satisfactory	5	8.2
Good	17	27.9
Very good	35	57.4
Excellent	3	4.9
Total	61	100

As the above table showed that the majority of respondent (57.4%) were ranked the overall performance as it was very good, the other 27.6% of respondent perceive as it was good in its last year performance. The overall result showed that around 90% of respondents believe the overall performance were good and above.

Interpretation of regression results

The variables which were statistically significant in the model to predict the performance of the institution are discussed as follows;

Leadership experience: leadership experience was statistically significant at 5% significance level and positive relationship with performance of the institute. This shows that managers of institution with previous leadership experience had higher probability of having good performance. Meaning a one year increase in experience creates a 6.8% increase in institution performance. Parallel findings have been reported by other researchers who found that key benefit of leadership experience, helpful in identifying business opportunities, obtaining financing and other resources, and alleviating management challenges (Kantiset *et al.*, 2004).

Academic rank: it was statistically significant at 10% significance level and positive relationship with performance of the institute. This shows that managers of institution with different academic rank had higher probability of having good performance. Meaning a one level increase in their academic rank result a 31% increase in institution performance. Similar studies by Harry Hertz (NIST, 2011), stated the Education Criteria are increasingly used by American educational institutions to improve performance. These criteria are continually updated to help institutions respond to the "current challenges of the need to create value for students, stakeholders, and organization.

Policy and procedures are in place: it was statistically significant at 10% significance level and positive relationship with performance of the institute. This shows that managers of institution with good implementation of policy and procedure in place had higher probability of having good performance. Meaning an effective implementation of policies results a 22% improvement in institution performance. Studies from victor valley college self-studies 2011 showed that Governance roles are defined in policy and are designed to facilitate decisions that support services and improve in situational effectiveness.

Making professional learning community: it was statistically significant at 10% significance level and positive relationship with performance of the institute. This shows that managers of institution with high professional had higher probability of having excellent performance. Meaning a good official's professional appraisal resulted in a 19% increase in institution performance. The study from Malaysia Lokman Mohd Tahir, 2013 showed that through active interactions among the academics, professional relationships are bonded that will encourage the academics to share ideas, learn from one another, and help their colleagues or even give suggestion to improve the job performance of their colleagues, academics and university improvements.

Ensure efficient financial management and accountability: it was statistically significant at 5% significance level and positive relationship with performance of the institute. This shows that the better management of institutional finance had higher probability of having good performance. Meaning the better its availability, management, accountability and audit system for financial resources results in a 27% increase in institution performance. Financial management especially in the public sector is intricately linked to performance management; and as elaborated by Hood (1995), conceptualization of financial management in recent times is seen as a transition from traditional public accountability to new forms of public management.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall results of the respondent perception towards last year institutional performance was good and above. The result of multiple regression model revealed that out of eleven variables included in the analysis, five explanatory variables were found to be significant at different probability level. Those variables/standards are leadership experience, academic rank, making professional learning community, ensure efficient financial management and accountability and putting Policy and procedures are in place. But the rest were found to be positively associated with institutional performance even if no significant effect on institutional performance.

From the findings, it is recommended that the university officials should update its policies and procedures through participation of the whole community, developing system on the way policies are

implemented and collecting feedback from stakeholders about the extent of implementation and effects of policies.

Professional pathways should include professional learning priorities; time should be allocated for professional dialogue and sufficiently resourced. Financial resource allocation and distribution should be made to each unit of the University in accordance with aligned work and activities, providing training on institutional finance for concerned managers at different level as required and introduction of a harmonized resource mobilization and reporting structure that captures the overall resource available to the institution. This will facilitate priority and strategy-based allocation as well as provide a true picture on the financing of institutions, although it is likely to compromise decentralized resource allocation since it is not applicable. And finally accessing training regarding educational leadership and promoting the staff to engaged in research and community service and publish on reputable journals will give opportunity for further investigation and sharing experience from the academic world that becomes a very good experience for the institution they lead and work.

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