

## Challenges of Strategy Implementation at the Eswatini Cotton Board

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### Abstract

*Strategy implementation is critical to the success of every organization. It addresses means of achieving desired goals and objectives. Literature review indicates that strategy formulation is given more focus than strategy implementation. Previous studies have shown that strategies fail due to poor implementation. Given the importance of strategy and its execution, it is imperative that the Eswatini Cotton Board identifies challenges that impede strategy implementation. This study investigates strategy implementation challenges at the Eswatini Cotton Board with an aim of providing recommendations on how to overcome the identified challenges. Qualitative research method was adopted in conducting the study. The target population included senior management and board members of the Eswatini Cotton Board who were familiar with strategy formulation and implementation. Ten interviewees were selected using purposive sampling technique. Primary data was collected using a semi structured interview schedule and analyzed by means of a thematic analysis. The findings indicate that poor management, lack of financial resources and poor coordination of activities are the key factors that hinder strategy implementation. The study recommends education and training, development of resource mobilization strategies, alignment of the organizations structure and effective communication.*

**Keywords:** Strategy implementation, Eswatini Cotton Board, Challenges, strategy implementation.

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### Introduction

Eswatini Cotton Board (ECB) is a Category A government parastatal under the Ministry of Agriculture. The parastatal was established through the Cotton Act no 26 of 1967. The cotton Act of 1967 mandates Eswatini Cotton Board to Grow the Swaziland Cotton Industry, through Regulating the Industry, promote cotton production in Eswatini, provide technical advice to farmers, provide market and marketing intelligence (Cotton Board, 2016).

According to the Public Enterprise Unit (PEU) Act of 1989, the Eswatini Cotton Board is expected to formulate a strategic plan every three years. The plan is reviewed annually. This requirement forces the Board to spend considerable amount of time and resources in developing a strategy to fulfilling its mandate. However, it has been observed that over the years, there is lack of evidence that Eswatini Cotton Board was successful in implementing the strategies. Oslen et al, (2005) argues that the biggest challenge relating to strategy of

organizations is the phase after planning which is implementation. Contemporary research has developed broad categories or factors within which the problems associated with strategy implementation can be couched. However, each organization is fundamentally different, and is driven by a different philosophy and culture with different resources at its disposal. As such it is difficult to institute corrective measures to rectify issues that hinder strategy implementation without having a thorough understanding of how these factors impact strategy implementation within a specific context.

Eswatini Cotton Board has over the years' experience challenges in implementing and executing its strategies. This has led to drastically reduction cotton production, reduced number of cotton farmers, failure to meeting the cotton ginnery throughput of 25 000 Mt, closing of the cotton spinning mill in 2018 and closing of more than 6 textile industries in Matsapha between 2014 and 2018. Given these problems,

this study seeks to investigate and identify challenges envisaged by Eswatini Cotton Board, with an aim of adopting the necessary actions to overcome the hindrances and thus have a stronger possibility of successful strategy implementation and achieve its mandate. It is envisaged that the findings will assist in informing the management of the Eswatini Cotton Board on the challenges that impede strategy implementation and also provide solutions.

## **Research methodology**

Based on the intention of the study and the need to ascertain participant's perceptions, phenomenology was adopted as the research philosophy in this study. Phenomenology enabled the researcher to ascertain participant's experiences and subjective views on the strategy implementation at Eswatini Cotton Board. The use of phenomenology as a research philosophy also promoted flexibility in data collection, thus enabling the researcher to explore beyond existing theories.

Qualitative research methodology was used to encompass the aspects and anticipated plan of how the research question will be answered. The methodology was supported by the adopted research philosophy and guided by the aim and key questions of the study (Pickard, 2012). Primary data was collected via case study research is context-rich and assists researchers in understanding a variety of variables within specific contexts. Target population included the employees, managers and directors of the different departments at the Eswatini Cotton Board. The size of the target population was 10 officers. The officers were selected based on their experience, knowledge and understanding of the organization and strategy implementation. Selecting the correct target population was importance in gathering the right information, as incorrect target population will result in potentially invalid finding.

Non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select a sample comprising of key-informants. Purposive sampling was entirely guided by the researchers judgement and ability to select participants whom are in a position to contribute to the study in a positive way. The researcher was knowledgeable about the participants experience, skills and ability to add value before approaching them (Creswell, 2013).

Although saturation could have been used to select a suitable sample for this study, it was anticipated that the characteristics of the purposely selected elements of the target population were relatively heterogenous. In line with the resources available at the researchers disposal, a sample size of 10 was selected.

A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was used to collect raw qualitative data for analysis. This choice was based on the flexibility that is inherent in the semi-structured interview approach. It allowed the researcher to probe and ask follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. Interview questions were guided by the research objectives. In using the objectives as a guide, the researcher ensured that only relevant data would be collected and that the aim of the study would be achieved.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. A sample size of three interviewees was used. The results and observations from the pilot study indicated that the interview took approximately 45 minutes to conclude and that participants were very eager to respond. The pilot study also aided the researcher in understanding that interviewees can quickly become derailed in their responses. In this regard, it was important to ask direct questions and to alert interviewees whenever responses went off topic.

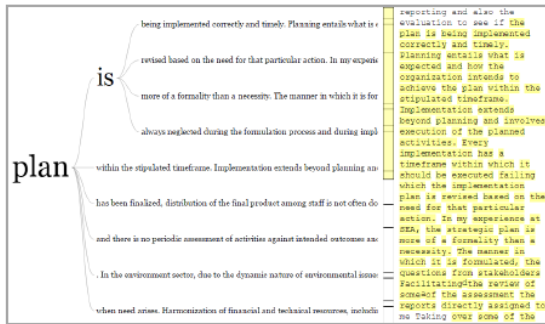
Prior to the interviews, a sheet containing brief information about the study and permission to request appointment was sent to target the ten key informants. All ten key informants had given their informed consent and had indicated their availability, time slots were allocated accordingly. Interview rooms were set-up in the different offices of the informants by the researcher and interviewee, with the intention of making the environment safe and conducive to interviewee participation. Before the interview could begin, interviewees were once again informed of the intention of the study. Interviewees were afforded the opportunity to ask questions about the research, for clarification purposes, before the interview commenced (Creswell, 2013).

During the interview, the interviewees' responses were recorded on paper by the interviewer and a tape was used to remind the researcher of what the respondent said. Interview questions were initially based on the interview schedule, and in some cases, the interviewer was

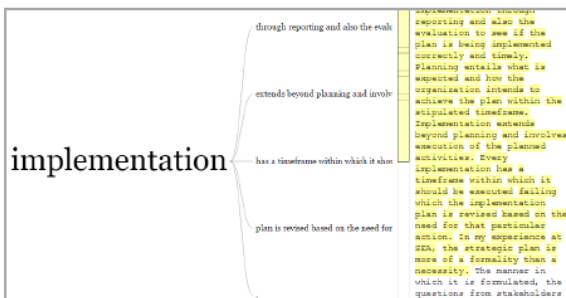


**Figure 3.** Participants understanding of the link between strategic planning and implementation

**Subtheme. Timeframes**



**Figure 4.** Timeframes



**Figure 4.** Timeframes

All the interviewees have a clear understanding of the link between strategic planning and implementation. They all understand that planning entails the expected outputs and how they will be achieved within a stipulated timeframe and that implementation is the execution of the planned activities. The word time frame was used very often by the interviewees as supported below by interviewee 1 and 5.

**Interviewee 1** explained that: *“Planning entails what is expected and how the organization intends to achieve the plan within the stipulated timeframe. Implementation extends beyond planning and involves execution of the planned activities.”*

**Interviewee 5** added that: *“Every implementation has a timeframe within which it should be executed failing which the implementation plan is revised based on the need for that particular action.”*

Thompson and Strickland (2007) argue that strategy implementation is all about performing on what has to be done internally to put formulated strategies in place thus guaranteeing that targeted results are achieved within the targeted time framework.

**Theme three**

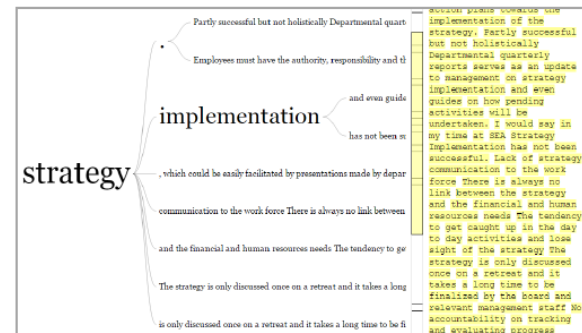
**The success of strategy implementation at ECB**

In order to explore the theme on the success of strategy implementation at ECB, interviewees were asked one question which comprised of two parts. Firstly, they were asked if they think that strategy implementation at ECB has been successful and to further elaborate on their response so to obtain the rich and thick detail required for qualitative analysis. Figure 5 below summarises the key and common words and phrases used by participants in answering these questions.



**Figure 5.** The success of strategy implementation at ECB

**Subtheme. Implementation failures**



**Figure 6.** Implementation failures

Eight of the participants are of the view that strategy has failed and only two participants believe that it has been successful to a certain extent. The eight participants explained that the approval of the strategic plan document takes time as it has to be approved by the Management Board. By the time it is approved the implementation period has already been reduced to two years instead of three.

**Interviewee 2** stated that: *“In my time at ECB Strategy Implementation has not been successful. The strategy is only discussed once on a retreat and it takes a long time to be finalized by the board”* He added that *“There is always no link between the strategy and the financial and human resources needs and the*

tendency to get caught up in the day to day activities and lose sight of the strategy.

**Interviewee 4** added that: “Implementation has been partly successful but not holistically.”

Richey and Klein (2015) found that up to 90% of organizations fail to effectively execute their strategic plans. The reasons for this are varied, but, most hinge on the fact that strategy implementation is resource intensive and requires buy-in throughout the organization.

## Theme four

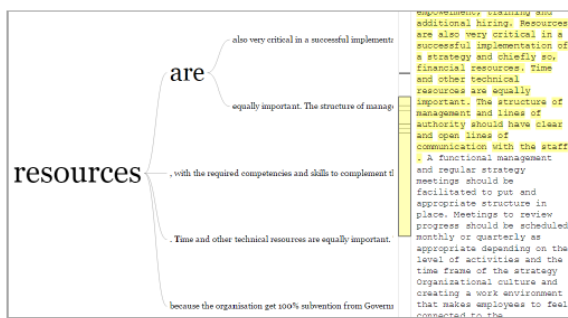
### Factors that contribute to the success or poor strategy implementation

In order to explore the theme on the factors that contribute to successful or poor strategy implementation, interviewees were asked to describe the factors that contribute to the success or poor strategy implementation. Figure 7 below summarises the key and common words and phrases used by participants in answering this question.



**Figure 7.** Factors that contribute to the success or poor strategy implementation

### Subtheme. Resources



**Figure 8.** Resources

Financial resources and human capital were mentioned by all of the participants. They explained that resources are essential in the implementation process failing which the strategy will fail.

**Interviewee 8** mentioned that: “Resources are very critical in the successful implementation of a strategy and chiefly so, financial resources. Time and other technical resources are equally important. “

**Interviewee 2** added that: “Resourceful persons within the organization to implement the strategy are a key factor and also the need for the organization to generate its own income and not rely on Government Subvention.”

According to Johnson and Scholes (2013), the human resource capabilities or the people working in an organization are the key to achieve effective implementation of the strategy. Insufficiency of any form of resources, such as insufficient funds, equipment and facilities, is often a big challenge during strategy implementation.

## Theme five

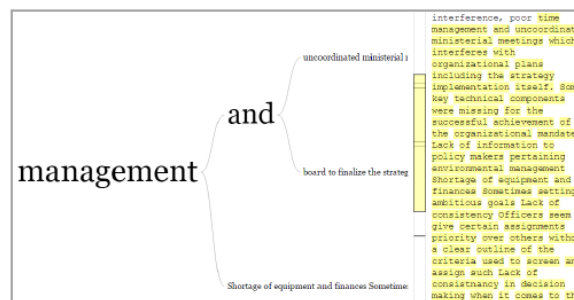
### Challenges faced by ECB in the implementation process

In order to explore the theme on the challenges faced by ECB in the implementation process, interviewees were asked to list and elaborate on the challenges faced by ECB in the implementation process. Figure 9 below summarises the key and common words and phrases used by participants in answering this question.



**Figure 9** Challenges faced by ECB in the implementation process

### Subtheme. Management



**Figure 10.** Management

Most of the participants mentioned poor management as a key challenge as management is responsible for communication and coordination of the activities of the organization in order to achieve the strategic plan objectives.

**Interviewee 4** explained that: *Implementation failure starts from the managers, who are*

supposed to be the ones monitoring and evaluating the overall implementation.

**Interviewee 6** added that: “Lack of coordination. Management lacks the required qualities to monitor, evaluate and reschedule the activities as outlined in the business plan.”

**Interviewee 9** further explained that: “Lack of consistency as officers seem to give certain assignments priority over others without a clear outline of the criteria used to screen and assign such and also lack of consistency in decision making.”

**Interviewee 10** concluded that: “Poor coordination of planned activities, lack of a monitoring and evaluation unit on strategy implementation, lack of resources, political interference, poor time management and uncoordinated ministerial meetings which interferes with organizational plans including the strategy implementation itself.”

According to (Dess and Taylor, 2011), strong leadership, commitment, and involvement by top management are very crucial for successful strategy implementations. Beer et al, (2000) found that not having clarity on the objectives of the strategy, the tasks and activities in the implementation, and the responsibilities that employees should take, could also have an adverse impact on the implementation of strategy.

## Theme six

### How ECB can overcome these challenges

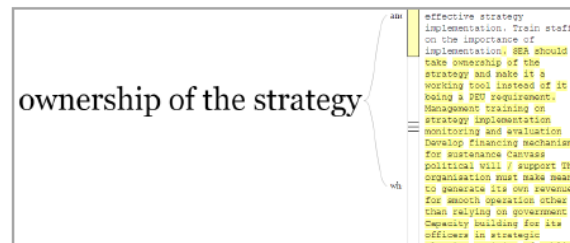
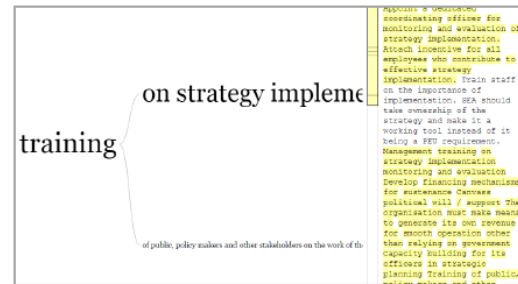
In order to explore the theme on how ECB can overcome the challenges faced by ECB in the implementation process, interviewees were asked to state on how ECB can overcome the identified challenges.

Figure 11 below summarises the key and common words and phrases used by participants in answering this question.



**Figure 11.** How ECB can overcome these challenges

### Subtheme. Training and better management



**Figure 12.** Training and Better Management

Most of the participants mention training of management on strategic implementation and the need for the organization to generate its own income the means of overcoming the identified challenges. The appointment of a dedicated officer to monitor and evaluate the strategic implementation process and also offering incentives to employees is also key to successful strategy implementation.

**Interviewee 3** mentioned that: *Appoint a dedicated coordinating officer for monitoring and evaluation of strategy implementation. Attach incentive for all employees who contribute to effective strategy implementation. Train staff on the importance of implementation. ECB should take ownership of the strategy and make it a working tool instead of it being a PEU requirement.*

**Interviewee 7** stated that: *Management should be trained on strategy implementation monitoring and evaluation.*

**Interviewee 5** added that: *ECB should develop financing mechanisms for sustenance and also canvass political will and support of the organization and its activities.*

**Interviewee 1** concluded that: *The organization must make means to generate its own revenue for smooth operation other than relying on government subvention.*

Effective strategy implementation needs a critical mass of knowledge to enable people to work out problems within the framework of the implementation system. If the staff do not understand how a system works, they will create their own processes using those parts of the

system they are able to manipulate (Zaribaf, 2005).

Top management must be fully devoted to spend sufficient money on education and training and include it as part of the implementation budget (Speculand, 2009). According to Rowley and Sherman's (2012) study, an effective way of implementing a strategic plan is through building a budget that supports it. An organization's budget is the single most powerful activity. Control of the budget is control of the strategic plan as well as control of the organization.

### Theme seven

The role of management and staff in the formulation and implementation of the strategy

In order to explore the theme on the role of management and staff in the formulation and implementation of the strategy, interviewees were asked two questions. First, to elaborate on the role of management and staff. Secondly, to state the advantages and disadvantages of the method used. Figure 13 below summarises the key and common words and phrases used by participants in answering these questions.



Figure 13. The role of management and staff in the formulation and implementation of the strategy

### Subtheme. Management formulates, staff implements

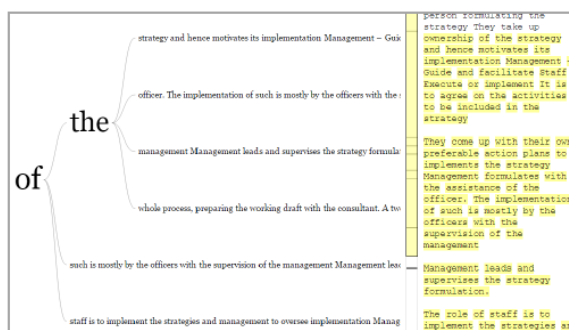


Figure 14. Management formulates, Staff implements

Most participants are of the view that management formulates the strategy and employees implements as supported by the following assertions:

**Interviewee 1** mentioned that: *Management guides and facilitate the planning process and the staff executes or implement the strategy.*

**Interviewee 4** added that: *Management gives information to the independent person formulating the strategy; they take up ownership of the strategy and hence motivates its implementation. They come up with their own preferable action plans to implement the strategy*

**Interviewee 6** stated that: *Management leads and supervises the strategy formulation.*

**Interviewee 7** explained that: *Management formulates with the assistance of the officers. The implementation of such is mostly by the officers with the supervision of the management.*

**Interviewee 10:** *The role of staff is to implement the strategies and management to oversee implementation.*

According to Thompson et al (2008) Formulating and executing strategy are core management functions. According to Hough et al (2008) Top management formulates the strategic plan for the entire organization. These plans can only succeed if properly supported and implemented by middle and lower management.

### Discussion

The literature review confirmed the importance of a strategy in every organization to provide direction for the future. The need for a strategic planning exercise was confirmed to design the action steps for future direction. The importance of strategy implementation is confirmed by many researchers as key to achieve the organizations goals (Al-Ghamdi, 1998, Brache, 1992, Lorange, 1998). Clear understanding of the organization's strategic goals, commitment by top managers, organizational change management, great implementation team, extensive education and training and performance measures were found to be the critical elements in strategy implementation (Johnson and Scholes 2012). The review indicated the importance of leadership, culture, structure, people and systems, policies, reward systems and resources as the means of implementing strategy without which implementation will fail (Heracleous, 2014).

The finding of the study revealed that employees of the organization are aware of the importance of a strategy and its implementation.

All employees confirmed involvement in the strategic planning process but were not aware of their roles in the strategy implementation process which confirms the hypothesis of unclear roles and responsibilities as a challenge to strategy implementation, similar finding was reported by Brenes and Mena (2008).

Concerning leadership, the findings supported the theory that the role of leaders is to guide others to achieve the objectives of the organization to improve efficiency. According to Peng and Littlejohn (2011), management should lead, communicate, coordinate and support employees in strategy implementation. Results also supported the theory by Howell and Costley (2006) that resources such as funds, equipment and human capital are a key factor in strategy implementation.

Insufficient resource hindered strategy implementation and ECB was not be able to achieve its mandate. The same was reported by Bimani and Langfield (2007), when studying Structure, formality and the importance of financial and non-financial information in strategy development and implementation. Alignment of ECB structure to the new strategy and the coordination of strategic plan activities amongst departments were mentioned as important factors in order for ECB strategy implementation to be a success. The findings are in line with those of Higgins, (2005) when studying the eight of successful strategy execution.

## Conclusions

1. Eswatini Cotton Board (ECB) management should lead, communicate, coordinate and support employees in strategy implementation to drive the implementation process.
2. Adequate resources should be provided to implementation the strategy. The Board reliance on government subvention hinders the implementation of the strategy as the funding is not enough. Skilled employees are required for full implementation of the strategy.
3. A new structure introducing a full-time strategy implementing coordinator should be adopted by ECB to enhance strategy and implementation.
4. Continuous strategy reporting, communication, review and progress

monitoring should be carried out on quarterly basis.

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