



RESEARCH ARTICLE

2023, vol. 10, issue 2, 212 - 222  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15254271>

## ENABLING FACTORS IN STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION: THE NORTH-WEST DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The strategic plan implementation challenges faced by the North West Department of Education were examined in this article. It listed and described the department's key strategy implementation factors. The effectiveness of these strategies was evaluated by the researcher using scholarly discourse, documentary analysis, and a qualitative survey. Tool performance was also looked at. The data was examined by Atlas/TI7. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews and content analyses. The Okomus theory of strategy implementation was employed.

Keywords: Strategy Implementation; Strategy implementation failure, Okomus theory of strategy implementation

### 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Strategic management, which comprises strategic planning, implementation, and control, has sparked substantial interest in both the public and commercial sectors, according to recent literature (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2022; Chungyas & Trinidad, 2022; Peters, Pierre, Srensen, & Torfing, 2022). To develop strategic management models, the European private sector applied management and leadership ideas developed in a Western setting. These theories have their origins in the history of European philosophical schools of thought. In comparison to strategic planning, the amount of attention dedicated to strategic plan implementation has been relatively modest. Many organisations spend a lot of money developing thorough plans, but they usually fail to commit the same time and work to developing implementation plans and controls. Numerous effective strategies have been proven in the literature to be absolutely ineffective. Without a doubt, the European private sector has spent a significant amount of time and effort investigating the root causes of failure in strategic execution. There appears to be a lack of production in the public sector.

The colonisation process is responsible for bringing and integrating Western philosophy, culture, theories, and strategic management into the public and private sectors (Hunter, Tripathi, Flowers, Wilson, & Wilson, 2023; Sule & Ridwanullah, 2023). The primary purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how colonialism influenced management practices, with a specific emphasis on strategic management. It is important to note that this study does not go into detail about colonisation and its impacts in Africa. Despite the study's narrow scope, the empirical studies it cites all agree on the elements and challenges affecting how well strategic plans are implemented across Africa, with a special emphasis on South Africa. Furthermore, they reach the unsubstantiated conclusion that decolonization is necessary and advocate for the development of an Afrocentric strategic management framework for better execution (AboZena, Jones, & Mattis, 2022; Machingambi, 2020; Auriacombe & Cloete, 2019).

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South Africa, the latest country to do so, overthrew the harsh colonial tyranny of apartheid. Prior to 1994, colonialists were more concerned with establishing management theories than with controlling and governing the black populace. It introduced a complete Western strategic management framework. Following 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) government undertook a number of projects aimed at establishing planning, monitoring, and evaluation in the public sector. They have also created a number of frameworks and models. According to an empirical study conducted in South Africa, similar driving and impeding elements for strategy implementation may be found in Africa. The delivery of services has suffered a considerable reduction and deterioration.

Based on research in the literature, it has been found that the public sector departments in the North West Province of South Africa devote insufficient attention to evaluating the implementation of strategic plans. In order to conduct this study effectively, it is critical to identify and assess the barriers preventing the North West Department of Education's (NWDoE) strategic plan from being executed. The development of tailored interventions to mitigate the negative effects of these restrictions on specific people or groups may be incorporated in the implementation of strategic interventions by the public sector, notably in the context of the NWDoE. The literature on strategic plan execution in the South African public sector is limited, particularly when it comes to the NWDoE's strategic management initiatives. As a result, there is a significant research gap that necessitates this study. To date, no academic study appears to have used qualitative content analysis as the primary strategy for acquiring and analysing data.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Data collection**

To establish its content base, this article draws on extensive sources. The directed approach is essential in the field of content analysis for creating or conceptually validating theoretical frameworks. By citing established theories or earlier academic works, research questions can be improved. Deductive categorization, as described by Mayring (2000), can be used to generate predictions about variables of interest or relationships between variables to help with deciding on the initial coding scheme or creating connections between codes. Comparatively speaking to the traditional approach, the directed approach to content analysis follows a more structured procedure (Hickey & Kipping, 1996).

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It is critical to understand that this study emphasises the use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), which uses qualitative data to support or contest theories about the implementation of strategic plans within the public sector, particularly with regard to the NWDoE.

The author has created a special hybrid model specifically for this study that is suited to its intended uses. The eight-step Schreier (2012), six-step Krippendorff (2004), and eleven-step Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) models of qualitative comparative analysis are all combined in this integration (QCA). The author incorporates methodologies suggested by a number of scholars working in the area of qualitative content analysis (QCA), including Miles and Huberman (1994), Hsieh and Shannon (2005), Boyatzis (1998), and Crabtree and Miller (1992 & 1999). Both qualitative surveys and documentary analysis were done using this comprehensive approach. Documentary analyses and a qualitative survey were both used as data collection techniques.

### 3 SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE AND FINDINGS

This investigation focuses on how the NWDoE is carrying out its strategic plan. A thorough analysis of the elements influencing and impeding the department's ability to carry out its strategic plan is the goal. The investigation evaluated how well the NWDoE was carrying out its strategic plan. A quick explanation of the differences between the public and private sectors turned out to be crucial. That allowed me to receive the proper contextual information and study emphasis. The conceptualization of strategy, strategic management, and strategic planning must be briefly summarised before moving on to the implementation of a strategic plan.

As a framework for the literature inclusion part, the author provided an outline of their theoretical frameworks and research questions. Three different sets of empirical studies—from the Western, African, and South African groups—were combined to create the review's framework. Deliberate grouping was used to examine the implementation of strategies across various contexts in order to strengthen the current investigation. Both public and private sector representatives were present in these studies and empirical cases. Numerous factors, also known as stumbling blocks, exist that prevent the successful implementation of strategies. Even though the causes of unsuccessful strategy implementation can vary, the root problems are frequently predictable.

Thompson and Strickland (1995) claimed that the process of implementing a strategy presents a greater level of difficulty and takes more time than the development of a strategy, according to Rausch et al. (2001). This phenomenon can be explained by the vast array of managerial responsibilities that must be fulfilled and the abundance of options available to managers. Individuals need to be persistent and have specific people management skills in order to successfully launch and lead various endeavours. The aforementioned incidents take place in a setting where there is a general tendency to resist or challenge changes. Recent international case studies that were carried out in both the public and private sectors have led to a variety of conclusions. The studies cited in Aldehayyat et al. include those by Wernham (1984), Alexander (1985), Kargar and Blumenthal (1994), Ber and Eisenstat (2000), Peng and Litteljohn (2001), Heide et al. (2002), Aldehayyat et al. (2010), Chiou (2011), Walker and Hazlett (2011), Dzomir (2015), and Dzomir (2015), in addition to Okumus (2009). Despite using a variety of methodologies and strategies, the researchers' findings come to a compelling conclusion about the obstacles that prevent the implementation of strategic plans. These studies provide generally supporting evidence.

The body of existing literature and empirical data from the NWDoE show that putting strategies into practice is very difficult. According to the qualitative survey responses, participants identified unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic challenges and insufficient leadership as the main causes, which accounted for 26% of the responses. Next, which was mentioned by 21% of participants, is a lack of ownership and competing priorities. Furthermore, with 20% of participants rating them highly, poor financial resources and insufficient coordination were also mentioned as important concerns. According to the results, a sizable portion of participants, specifically 18% (18%), expressed concerns about problems like a lack of time, a bad structure, and a small number of stakeholders who were involved.

Western countries have consistently identified a common context in which strategic management is applied in both private and public empirical studies. The factors and barriers affecting strategic implementation in both the public and private sectors share a lot in common. There are apparent parallels between the philosophy and the implementation theories. The literature on this subject has been authored by Miller (2002), Okumus (2001), Hacker (2001), Kaplan & Norton (2001), Aaltonen & Ikavalko (2002), Freedman (2003), and Noble (1999). Many authors have cited a variety of elements in their work. The development of strategies (Puko/Ater 2008), change management (Hrebiniak 2005b, 2008), organisational culture (Hrebiniak 2005b), Alexander (1985), AlGhamdi (1998), and organisational power structure are some of these factors (Hrebiniak 2005b, 2006). Gurkov (2009); Hrebiniak 2005b (Al-Ghamdi, 1998; Hrebiniak, 2005b; Kaplan/Norton, 2006); and Leadership (Hrebiniak, 2005b; Brenes et al., 2008). (Kaplan/Norton, 2005; Hrebiniak, 2005b; Hambrick/Cannella, 1989).

The discourse on strategic management highlights a variety of difficulties encountered when putting strategies into practice (Okumus, 2001; Dobni, 2003; Dooley et al., 2000; Freedman, 2003; Beer & Eisenstant, 2000; Hoag et al., 2002; Dobni, 2003; Galpin, 1998). The various roadblocks identified by Wessel (1993) in KSEOöLU, et al. (2000) supports Corboy & O'Corrbui (1999) that impede progress are covered by Alexander (1991). These challenges

include a lack of time, unanticipated big issues, poor coordination, competing demands and crises, a lack of skills and training, uncontrollable environmental factors outside of one's control, poor leadership and direction, and poorly defined tasks. Contrarily, as Europe struggled to integrate and implement private sector models within the public sector, Africa faced a double threat.

African nations were forced to adopt private sector-based theories in the public sector due to the colonial era's imposition of Western theories without sufficient moderation or adaptation. Due to the significant and long-lasting effects of this double risk, The Afrocentric theoretical framework, which has been previously examined, holds significant potential for facilitating the process of decolonizing management as a whole, with a focus on strategic management in particular, according to Mumbu and Mingaine's (2015) academic work as well as Ng'ang'a and Ombui's (2013) research. Nyakegira (2015), Imbali, Muturi, and Abuga (2016), Abok, Gakure, Waititu, and Ragui (2013), Nyanga (2018), Alamsjah (2011), Ndzoziya (2019), Ahiauzu (1986), Amoako-Agyei (2009), An Afrocentric Alliance (2001), Carr, MacLachlan, Kachedwa, and Kanyangale (1997), Khoza (2006), Mangaliso (2001), Mangcu (2007), Manwa and Manwa (2007), and Maphisa (1994) examined a myriad of contexts in which strategic plans were implemented in Africa.

The facilitating and impeding factors in Africa as a whole, and specifically in South Africa, show a high degree of similarity when considering the execution of strategies. The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this study are consistent with those found in the works of Leslie (2008), Maotwanyane (2017), Mkhabela (2017), Mwanje (2015), Nkosi (2015), Van Wyk (2014), Bremner (2020), Enwereji (2019), and Bremner (2016). Moreover, the existing body of literature indicates that organisations that implement efficient strategies tend to achieve better performance outcomes compared to those that do not (Sharabati & Fuqaha, 2014; Hassan, Qureshi, Sharif & Mukhtar, 2013; Abu-Hassan, Tufali, Yusof & Virgiyanti, 2011; Houtzschenreuter & Kliendienat, 2007; Umashankar & Dutta, 2007).

A comprehensive compilation of existing literature allows for the identification of various factors that could impede the successful implementation of strategic plans. The focus of this inquiry is to discern the primary challenges faced by the NWDoE. The impediments unearthed encompass a range of issues, including inadequate consideration for strategic planning, flawed strategic thinking, and a mismatch between strategy and objectives. Time constraints and delays in implementation, unanticipated market changes, and a lack of consensus among decision-makers are among the highlighted challenges.

Furthermore, additional barriers are unveiled through the examination. These encompass a top-down management approach, resulting in limited input from lower-level employees and neglect of operational flaws. The organizational structure misalignment with strategic goals, inappropriate resource allocation, deficient communication, internal competition among units, and ineffective evaluation systems are also identified challenges. Ineffective leadership, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient training, and suboptimal personnel management practices further compound the hurdles. The organization is also susceptible to uncontrollable internal and external factors, such as unforeseen events or shifts in the market.

To navigate these challenges effectively, adopting a dynamic strategy is recommended. This approach involves the simultaneous development and application of strategies to address high levels of uncertainty and volatility. Leslie (2008) emphasizes the importance of such a dynamic strategy for organizations facing complex and unpredictable environments. In conclusion, a proactive and multifaceted strategy is essential for the NWDoE to surmount the identified impediments and achieve successful strategic execution.

#### 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

Okumus' Conceptual Framework of Strategy Implementation (2003) was used as the study's theoretical foundation. As the theoretical framework forms the basis of the study, it is crucial to recognise this aspect. This information served as the basis for the methodology used for data collection and interpretation, which will be presented. Okumus claims that a review of the earlier frameworks reveals the existence of 11 key elements that can be identified for implementation. The following components: strategic planning, environmental instability, organisational structure, corporate culture, resource planning, resource allocation, communication, people, control, and result are the first seven factors. The previously identified 11 implementation factors can be divided into four different groups, including strategic content and strategic context.

According to the author, the aforementioned elements are frequently cited as important factors to take into account when putting the strategy into practice. It's crucial to remember that these ideas shouldn't be taken as gospel. The field of strategic management includes a number of schools of thought, each with its own set of presumptions and suggestions regarding the use, organisation, and articulation of implementation factors (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Okumus & Roper, 1999; Stacey, 1999). Every school of thought, with the exception of those on configuration and complexity, calls for or supports a standardised design for each factor. This theoretical

framework was used to create the coding framework, which served as the framework for the analyses. The empirical results for all four research projects are presented in the following section.

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## 5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The factors that prevent the NWDoE from implementing its strategic plan were the subject of the third research question, which was also looked at. On the basis of the body of literature already in existence, a thorough list of elements that might prevent strategic plans from being carried out successfully can be put together. The NWDoE may conduct investigations to determine the biggest obstacles they have encountered. Other researchers (Okumus, 2001; Dobni, 2003; Dooley et al., 2000; Freedman, 2003; Beer & Eisenstant, 2000; Hoag et al., 2002; Corboy & O'Corrbui, 1999; Dobni, 2003; Galpin, 1998) have also noted a number of the obstacles that Baier et al. (1988) identified. These obstacles include a variety of problems that prevent the implementation of strategies, such as administrative inefficiency and conflicts of interest among decision-makers.

This study combined qualitative survey techniques with documentary analysis. The following factors should be taken into consideration by the department when putting its strategic plan into action, according to both strategies: The third research question looked at the challenges and impediments that management faces as they move from strategic planning to strategy implementation, as well as the related issues of coordination and control. The study's conclusions showed that, when compared to the initial strategic planning process, strategy implementation, support functions, and monitoring are thought to be less effective. The NWDoE received the following results from the qualitative survey: The participants were questioned regarding the major impediments to the strategic plan's implementation in the North West.

Their response made unexpected occurrences, like the COVID-19 pandemic, a major point (as expected). It was determined that the existence of subpar leadership was a significant contributing factor, which resulted in a general lack of accountability for the strategy. As a result, there was a glaring gap in the capacity to carry out the required actions in an efficient manner. This discovery is crucial because the incapacity and lack of competence of those in charge of carrying out a strategy can prevent it from being implemented successfully. The consequences are serious. The presence of a pathologically high rate of job openings and a poor organizational structure, which has led to a toxic organizational culture, was also noted by participants. Participants identified inadequate education and skill development as barriers to effective strategy implementation. Limited access to resources and the insufficient provision of rewards or incentives exacerbate this phenomenon.

A number of important conclusions have been drawn after 56 reports from the NWDoE were examined through the lenses of documentary analysis, network view, conceptual analysis, and relational analysis. These results point to a lack of executive and administrative leadership, a weak organisational design, a failure to achieve goals, a lack of strategic implementation planning, and poor human resource management. These elements have been recognised as major impediments or barriers to the effective application of strategies within the NWDoE. As a result, the department experiences poor results and fails to meet its goals. The proposed approach is probably not going to work, which will result in a decline in both outputs and outcomes.

In order to answer the third research question, a number of challenges have been noted, including unexpected difficulties, insufficient leadership, a lack of ownership, competing priorities, a lack of resources, inefficient coordination, inadequate time allocation, poor organisational structure, and insufficient stakeholder involvement. A thorough documentary analysis was done to find out what hinders or prevents the NWDoE from putting its



strategic plans into action. 205 quotations in the context of leadership were discovered by the software Atlas/ti7, while only 69 were discovered to be favourable. In addition, 202 of the total number of quotations expressed a negative opinion of how the department used its resources to carry out the strategic plan. It is somewhat unsettling that slightly more than 100 quotations demonstrate favourable utilisation.

Only 67 positive quotations about organisational culture were found, compared to a total of 196 negative ones. Similar results were found for organisational structure, where 106 negative quotes compared to only 29 positive quotes, all taken from primary sources, were found. The data do, however, show a significant concern with regard to control and monitoring, as shown by the 108 quotations from the documents that show insufficient control and monitoring, as opposed to the 37 quotations that suggest the opposite. Implementing a strategic plan successfully in the NWDoE requires the inclusion of control, monitoring, and feedback mechanisms.

The most crucial finding is that proper resource utilisation is only seen 32 times, compared to 77 instances of poor resource utilisation. Similar findings can be drawn regarding insufficient resource provisioning, where there were 70 instances of insufficient provisioning and 33 instances of adequate provisioning. There are 46 negative and 12 positive quotations about communication, which is another application of the aforementioned principle. The negative comments made by individuals mainly focused on knowledge gaps (981), insufficient skills (73), poor hiring procedures (60), inadequate access to information (37), and training, feedback, and participation gaps, each of which was mentioned about 37 times. The current investigation has uncovered a number of empirical factors that are thought to be connected to the answer to research question 3. Both qualitative survey data and document analysis were used to derive these factors. Unexpected challenges, poor leadership, a lack of ownership, competing priorities, a lack of time, a poor organisational structure, poor stakeholder involvement, poor resource utilisation, a negative organisational culture, poor control mechanisms, poor monitoring practices, poor resource provisioning, poor communication, a lack of knowledge, and poor skill are some of the contributing factors.

Significant elements that negatively affect the strategic plan's implementation have been found to include the NWDoE's leadership, culture, and organisational structure. The implication is that the use of extremely scarce resources is not being done to its full potential. The NWDoE is performing monitoring and recommendation execution in an insufficient manner. A strategic plan's controls and feedback mechanisms may not be as effective as they claim to be. Neither the implementation nor the success of the suggested strategy are likely. These various components' combined existence suggests a disconnect between the planning process and its ultimate execution. These elements might not have been sufficiently considered and clarified during the initial planning stage. to create an appropriate framework of goals for each individual. Organisational structure, resource limitations, and leadership difficulties are some of the issues that are frequently brought up. The impacts of extrinsic factors are illustrated in the sixth category of the table above, whereas intrinsic factors are covered by the first five categories. The following table contains an organisation and classification of the factors. Additionally, a number of authors (including Alexander, Wessel, AlGhamdi, Kalali, and Allio) have seen the effects of an additional factor they have dubbed "distractors," which denotes a change from the norm.

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## 6 STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

In order to properly discuss the effects of research questions one and two, we must cite the findings of the analyses done on the outcomes of the NWDoE. Further understanding of the conclusions that were previously covered as conclusions two and three will be provided by these additional findings. It will offer more help in understanding the progression of the implementation model that was created in Conclusion 4. During the last

stages, the outcomes of the strategic plan's execution are essential. It has to do with the tangible results. Have we been successful in achieving our goals? Have we noticed any favourable outcomes as a result of the strategy's application? What specific results and effects can the strategy be credited with? Does empirical data back up the assertion that the NWDoE successfully implemented its strategy?

588 quotations were obtained from the documentary analysis of 11 codes related to the outputs and outcomes of the NWDoE. Notably, 366 of the 588 total quotations were found to represent negative accomplishments, while the remaining 192 quotations were linked to positive accomplishments. The data analysis showed that 98 quotations in total were taken from 52 different reports published by the NWDoE. The occurrence of goal failure, which was mentioned 79 times, was the main topic of these quotations. In addition, inadequate human resource management (HRM) practices were mentioned in 65 quotations, while poor implementation was mentioned in 76. Furthermore, 35 quotations made mention of the lack of successful strategy implementation. The information provided is unsettling. It is determined that poor HRM practices are the main cause of the failure, which is then followed by goal failure, ineffective HRM strategies, and poor implementation.

The quotes that are deemed encouraging mainly speak to successful strategic and operational plans, with a focus on achievements within the curriculum. The phrase "poor results" has been used 100 times across 56 documents, according to network view analyses done on Atlas/ti7, while the phrases "poor implementation" and "goal failure" have been used about 80 times each. The aforementioned statistic repeatedly names HRM as a problem, citing it 63 times in total. When there are between 0 and 20 quotes, the issue of operational plans and annual performance plans (APPs) is not present. With only 38 quotations, the NWDoE strategic plan's impact is barely mentioned in the literature that is currently available. The majority of these quotes, it should be noted, primarily concentrate on curriculum outcomes rather than the overall.

## **7 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NWDOE**

Executive managers at the top of the organisation must be committed to and supportive of the strategy in order for it to be successfully implemented. It is essential to cite the following empirical sources when discussing the NWDoE: This discussion is centred on strategic information. The department appears to be successfully creating a targeted and clear strategic plan that adheres to the principals' instructions. The overall strategic direction of the department is in line with all legislative requirements that have a wide scope. The relationship between impact, results, outcome indicators, and output indicators can be clearly seen. The department has a wealth of experience in creating plans.

The COVID-19 pandemic's effects appeared to seriously undermine strategic plans. Within the department, there was a clear lack of readiness for potential destruction. This exposed the department's shortcomings, including both its structural problems and its human resource problems. The department does not have a business continuity plan, and its risk management procedures are subpar. The dynamics and results of a given situation are significantly shaped by the internal context and organizational factors. The aforementioned problems are the main causes of the NWDoE's inability to successfully carry out a painstakingly created strategic plan.

According to the study's findings, it is clear that the department has serious problems with the planning and execution of its structures. Additionally, the department's poor hiring practices, which are characterised by political deployments, have a negative impact on the organisational culture. The previously mentioned factor has a big impact on the lack of training, knowledge, and skills. Additionally, there was a clear weakness in the area of leadership. The strategy's failure can be attributed to a poor culture that is primarily the result of a lack of consequence management. When putting its strategic initiatives into action, the NWDoE faces significant obstacles related to resource allocation and inefficient use. Efficiency is lacking when resources, both financial and otherwise, are allocated. This issue is made worse by the lack of effective controls and coordination. Unfavourable results were highlighted in the Auditor General's report that was published over the course of the previous three years.

## **8 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Putting strategies into action takes time and effort. In fact, empirical studies have shown that the implementation process presents significant challenges and frequently falls short of expected results. Practitioners need to better understand these barriers in order to implement strategies. This assertion does not imply that success will always be attained. The likelihood of success is increased by consistently identifying and eliminating barriers as well as by remaining vigilant during the implementation process. According to the researcher, effective communication across all organizational tiers is necessary for the development and dissemination of a comprehensive and resilient plan, which is essential for the successful execution of a strategic initiative. When a carefully planned strategy is not put into action, executives and managers are frequently baffled. This



phenomenon is also seen in the NWDoE. The conceptual analyses of empirical studies related to the execution of a strategic plan are the primary focus of this essay. This study, grounded in a theoretical framework, focused on identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of strategic plans in the public sector, specifically within the context of the NWDoE.

The researcher was able to successfully map the various factors that affect how strategic plans are implemented in various contexts, ranging from South Africa to Europe. The discussion in the content covered a range of motivating factors, such as resource allocation, control, communication, organizational culture, operational planning, and uncertainty in the environment. Lack of strategic planning, poor strategy formulation, inadequate goal alignment, time restraints, hasty implementation without due consideration, unexpected market shifts, a lack of consensus among decision-makers, competing priorities, a top-down management approach, insufficient involvement from lower-level employees, failure to identify significant flaws, and an organizational structure that is inefficient are some of the factors that prevent success. There are many items on the list. It is obvious that the public sector is feeling the effects the most, especially in Africa where the situation is the worst. While this is happening, private sector strategy implementation is difficult in both Europe and Africa. No exceptions are made in South Africa. In order to empirically investigate and comprehend the factors that influence and hinder the implementation of a strategic plan, this study analyzes the North West Department of Education (NWDoE) as a case study. Instead of solely relying on factors derived from the literature review and directed by the theoretical framework, these factors will be identified and understood based on empirical evidence.

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