

Strategic Responses and Performance in Postal Corporation of Kenya in Mandera County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the strategic responses to the performance among public enterprises in Kenya, with a case study of Postal Corporation of Kenya branches in Mandera County. The specific objectives include: to assess the influence of staff training on performance among public enterprises in Kenya; to establish the impact of ICT deployment on performance among public enterprises in Kenya; to assess the effect of customer relations management on the performance among public enterprises in Kenya; to determine the influence of strategic partner's management on the performance among public enterprises in Kenya. The study adopted a case study design. The target population was the 308 employees working for Postal Corporation of Kenya in Mandera County. Stratified sampling will be adopted so as to come up with a study sample size of 93 respondents. The study used mainly primary data that was collected through the use of a semi-structured questionnaire administered to the sampled staff. The researcher used content validity method to test validity of the research instrument while reliability was done through a pilot pretest. The data collected from the primary sources was systematically organized in a manner to facilitate analysis. The researcher used the SPSS computer program to analyze the data ensuring accuracy and limiting human error. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data was handled through content analysis focusing on information obtained from key informants. The results will then be presented using tables and charts for ease of understanding. This enhanced interpretation of findings generated and recommendations from the findings. The study concludes that that the company conducts training to enhance superior skills, knowledge and capabilities and Staff training has achieved high morale with increased confidence and motivation. The study further concludes that that ICT has improved business processes and changed the function of markets. The study also concludes that The company has spending on CRM geared at increasing efficiency The study finally concludes that The company has established strategic alliances and cooperation with other firms. The study recommends that organizations should endeavor to train its staff. Training is necessary to ensure an adequate supply of staff that is technically and socially competent and capable of career development geared towards helping organizations realize their vision. In the contemporary dynamic corporate world, employees are increasingly required to keep up to the upcoming changes. Training is important for employees' development as it enables them achieve self-fulfilling skills and abilities, reduce operational costs, limits organizational liabilities.

Key Words: *Strategic Responses, Organization Performance, Postal Corporation of Kenya, Mandera County, Kenya*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern day business operations have witnessed great interdependence between both profit and non-profit oriented entities. This has played a major role on how the businesses interact with the environment they operate in. The capacity for an organization to thrive in such an environment will be dependent upon their capacities to come up with appropriate strategies.

All organizations exist and operate in an open system and within communities and society settings. They affect and are equally affected by external conditions that are largely beyond their immediate control. Therefore, for organizations to remain competitive in the complex and unpredictable business environment, development of an appropriate strategy is crucial since the adaptation of an organization is necessitated by continual interaction with the environment. Response strategies are essential due to the fact that organizations are open systems and have a continuous interface and interaction with the external environment (Morrison, 2002). Ross (2011) observe that for organizations to provide quality service, they must streamline their policies to conform to changes in the environment in which they operate in. Changes in external environment necessitate adoption of efficient strategic responses that mitigate challenges faced in that sector of the economy. According to Dess and Robinson (2014) organizations and enterprises consistently need to link and align their leadership, managerial and operating activities to the environment in which they are located and operate in. Strategic management helps organizations and enterprises to critically adopt, engage and administer through the process of formulating, implementing and evaluating cross functional decisions that enable a firm to meet its objectives.

Staff training has the distinct role in the achievement of an organizational goal by incorporating the interests of organization and the workforce. Organizations invest huge amount on the human resource capital because the performance of human resource will ultimately increase the performance of the organization (Stone, 2012). According to Evans, Pucik and Barsoux (2012) argue that organizations are facing increased competition due to globalization, changes in technology, political and economic environments and therefore prompting these organizations to train their employees as one of the ways to prepare them to adjust to the increases above and thus enhance their performance. Information Communication Technology (ICT) is clearly considered as a key growth area in this century, specifically, in a dynamic and highly competitive business environment which requires utilizing advanced ICT tools to improve efficiency, cost effectiveness, and deliver high quality products and services to customers (Allen & Morton, 2014). Werthner and Klein (2015) indicates that ICT is considered as a tool of marketing, contacting customers and looking for possible customers, as well as presenting ICT services as distinguished potential services for customers. The authors further argue that Organisations are increasingly using information technology to develop solutions to business problems, to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the decision-making process, to enhance productivity and service quality, to achieve dynamic stability, and compete for new markets.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is increasingly important to firms as they seek to improve their profits through longer-term relationships with customers. CRM represents a strategy for creating value for both the firm and its customers through the appropriate use of technology, data and customer knowledge (Payne & Frow, 2015). This strategy requires focus, training, and investment in new technology and software to aid in the development of value adding CRM systems (Day & Van den Bulte, 2011). Hence, CRM brings together people, technology and organizational capabilities to ensure connectivity between the company, its customers and collaborating firms. The concept of strategic partnership is necessitated by the need for an organization to achieve its goals while leveraging on resources of another organization. Typically, strategic partnership can be viewed as a tool for competitive advantage (Maurrasse, 2013). The motivation for partnerships vary from one partnership to another but the fundamental reasons for business partnership according to DePamhilis (2016) include sharing of risks; gaining access to new markets; globalization; cost reduction; desire to acquire or exit a business and favourable regulatory treatment that partnerships often receive as compared with mergers and acquisition. Postal Corporation of

Kenya over the last decade has faced challenges in trying to meet ever changing customer preferences, technological advances as well as competition. PCK had recorded general reduction in postal traffic segments, revenue and profitability. Between 2005 and 2009, international letters posted, domestic parcels posted, and money orders issued had all been reducing in volumes by 13%, 9%, and 2% annually respectively. On the other hand, growth was realized in domestic letters posted, international parcels posted, total courier items handled, and agency business transactions by 2%, 39%, 30% and 27% per annum respectively. Owing to these challenges, Postal Corporation of Kenya management has worked tirelessly to ensure the organization is profitable and it is meeting its business objectives accordingly. Some of the strategic responses the organization has adopted include investment in technology, diversification into new markets (Postal Corporation of Kenya, 2008).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The dynamism of the business environment implies that organization have to constantly redesign their strategies in order to remain competitive or to survive. Failure to effectively adapt, the organization may lead to a strategic problem (Ansoff, 2006). Such a problem will be evidenced by a mistake between what the organization offers and what is in the market. Pearce and Robinson (2003) states that for such organizations to achieve their goals and objectives it is necessary for them to adjust to their environment by responding strategically to the conditions in the market. Kenya's ability to achieve its Vision 2030 objectives for instance is not wholly subject to its own making but on how it maps and plans to deal with changes in the operating environment, both local and international. Optimizing profitability in the current turbulent business environment requires companies have to craft strategies responsive to the performance (Machuki and Aosa, 2011). However, strategic responses shall require organizations to change their strategy to match the environment and to redesign their internal capability to match this strategy (Grant, 2010). The telecommunication industry in Kenya is constantly expanding due to liberalization, government support and product and service innovation. Managing the development and implementation of competitive strategy requires that managers at Postal Corporations in Kenya assess what resource gaps exist and that must be filled to ensure that the company's present strategy is competitive. Kairu (2013) carried out a study on the effect of strategic responses on Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) operational performance and found that KRA needs to align its strategic alliance in accordance to the objective it needs to. Nakhumwa (2015) study investigated the strategic responses to the business environment and performance of Old Mutual Kenya and established that Old Mutual Kenya Limited has adopted strategies similar to those adopted by other players in the financial services sector although it has been more aggressive in some aspects. Although these studies focused on strategic responses on organizational performance they focused on different study contexts. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the influence of strategic responses on the performance in Postal Corporation of Kenya.

3. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study was to assess the influence of strategic responses on the performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To examine the influence of staff training on performance of Postal Corporation in Kenya
- ii. To find out the influence of ICT deployment on performance of Postal Corporation in Kenya

- iii. To establish the influence of customer relations management on performance of Postal Corporation in Kenya
- iv. To determine the influence of strategic partners management on performance of Postal Corporation in Kenya

4. THEORETICAL REVIEW

A theoretical framework refers to how the researcher or writer of the report not only questions, but ponders and develops thoughts or theories on what the possible answers could be. This study will be guided by a number of theories as discussed subsequently. The thoughts and theories are grouped together into themes that frame the subject (Neuman, 2010). The process has led to identification of a core set of connectors within the study topic and shows how they fit together.

4.1 Open Systems Theory

The open systems theory comes from the relationship that emanates from the operation of an organization as a system. Organizations are thought of as systems with interrelated subsystems that process various inputs to generate various outputs, pleasing users and customers in the process. They depend therefore on the environment for their survival. Organizations as open systems remain efficient and effective by adapting to the shifts in their environment. They have to be concerned not only with what happens within and among its subsystems and people, but also with what happens outside of itself for no organization operates in a vacuum (Wilson & Eilertsen, 2010). The decisions the organization make have to fit in two environments internal and external. These forces influence condition in every organization; however the most influential force in one organization may have little impact on other organizations. Managers continually ought to scan and monitor the environment. This allows managers to determine their organizations best response to an environmental change. The systems therefore that interact with the environment are therefore open systems (Plunkett *et al.*, 2008). Environmental determinism argues that the environment is the primary mechanism for explaining the performance of an organization such as public enterprises. Therefore, strategic leaders have limited effect on the performance of an organization. There are different frameworks to help examine the macro environmental influences in which firms operate. A Political, Economic, Social and Technological (PEST) analysis is one of them. Firms do not have any influence on the macro environmental forces such as political, economic, social, and technological factors. Therefore, these factors can be viewed as either threats or opportunities. This theory will guide this study as an analysis of these factors on the country or region level would give a firm the chance to better position themselves within their environments through increased awareness and adaptation. Firms are also under their microenvironments" influence which has a closer effect on an organization's ability to make a profit. A microenvironment consists of bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of customers, threat of new entrants, and threat of substitute products (Plunkett *et al.*, 2008).

4.2 Contingency Theory

Contingency theory posits that the environment, managers and organizational factors all play a role in determining strategic direction. Contingency theory presumes that the ability of managers to influence organizational outcome is restricted by environmental factors and organizational factors (Carpenter & Golden, 2007). The theory is based upon the organism analogy, views organizations as consisting of a series of interdependent subsystems, each of which has a function to perform within the context of the organization as a whole. This can be related to technology, quality customer service, employees motivation and marketing strategy that

can be used to as a strategic response to competition by organizations. The human subsystem embraces the people in the organization, their leadership, and their motivation. Where uncertainty is to be associated with the mathematical concepts of probability and fuzziness or propositions of bounded rationality, it results in two approaches to uncertainty which are complementary to each other since the greater the amount of information that the organization needs to have in order to perform and to complete a task, the greater is the degree of cognition that the organization needs to have in order to process and to manage this information for task execution and completion (Nobre *et al.*, 2009). Contingency theory assumes that each of the subsystems is open to a range of variation. Each should be designed so that it is congruent with the others and corresponds to the environment with which it is faced. The technology used in the organization will also have an important effect upon the subsystems and the organizational structure. Contingency theory additionally rests upon the open systems view that regards the organization as dependent upon the wider environment. The marketing strategy performance is relevant to this study as it helps decide whether the organization survives or not, and is determined by the way the organization manages its relationship with the environment (Wilson & Eilertsen, 2010). The theory suggests that a leaner organizational structure and reduced red tape increase flexibility and facilitate the fit between intra-organizational processes and the environment. This is needed in public enterprises under study. Economically, a key reason for downsizing is to reduce costs as organizations seek to maximize efficiency (Zhang, 2000). Several strategies seem pertinent, notably a cost leadership strategy which enables the organization to increase return on sales, or to increase market share through aggressive costing. Following staff downsizing the company can mute the leaner cost structure into competitive advantage by increasing profitability or lowering prices, which will be expressed in increased market share.

4.3 Knowledge Based Theory

The Knowledge-Based View (KBV) of the firm addresses the issues of the existence, the boundaries, and the internal organization of the multi-person firm (Foss, 1996). The starting point is that knowledge is the key explanatory factor, and the nature of knowledge (tacit, socially constructed etc.) is an important determinant enhancing understanding of firm organization behaviour and its strategic responses (Foss, 2005). The objectives of knowledge based view (KBV) are to make the enterprise act as intelligently as possible to secure its capability and overall success and to otherwise realize the best value of its knowledge assets (Grant, 1996). This knowledge is embedded and carried through multiple entities including organizational culture, policies, routines, documents, and employees (Candra, 2014). The relationship between KBV and performance of a business such as public enterprises is important in the study of strategic responses to the performance among public enterprises in Kenya. This theory is relevant to this study as it explains the interactions between varied strategic responses and the performance. The tenets include staff training, ICT development, CRM and strategic partner's management (Wilson & Eilertsen, 2010). According to this theory, if knowledge management, an intangible asset which is a strategic response is implemented effectively in different levels of business operations, it leads to some unique capabilities and capacities which in turn lead to superior performance, the hallmark of firm performance (Leal-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2013).

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent Variables

Dependent Variable

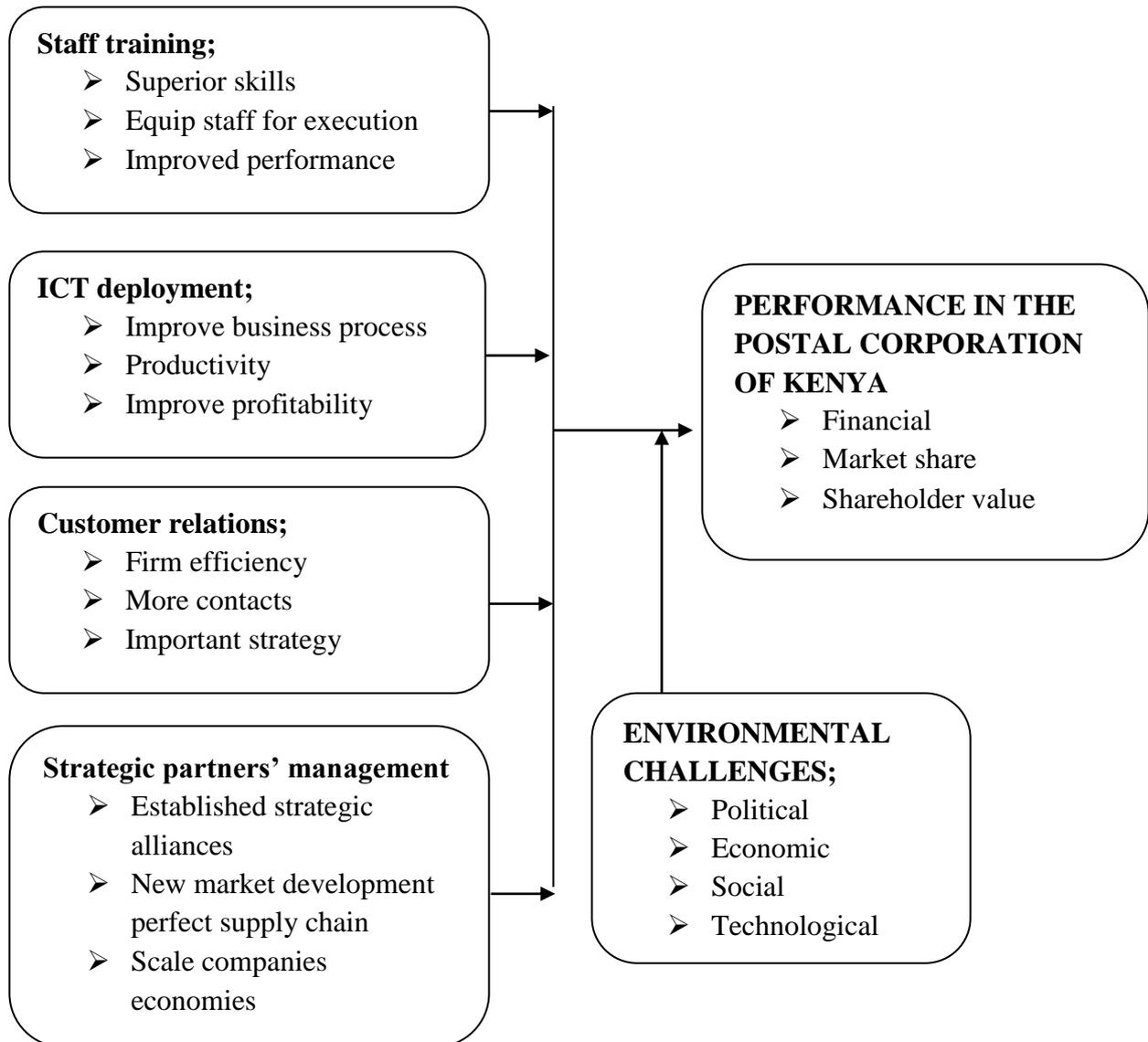


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out through a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Saunders *et al*, 2009). Descriptive survey research design was chosen because it enabled the researcher to generalize the findings to a larger population and it was more precise and accurate since it involves description of events in a carefully planned way. The target population was all the employees working in Postal Corporation of Kenya Mandera County branches. Postal Corporation of Kenya operates 6 post offices across the county with about 300 employees. The target population of this study was thus the staff in the senior category, middle level and support staff. The study used stratified sampling to ensure that all cases are well represented and then simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. A sample size of 30% is taken

(Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). This study used questionnaire as a data collection tool to all the respondents. The instrument was chosen because the targeted population was literate which minimized the interpretation of the questions for their understanding to capture reliable information. The questionnaires were divided into different sections covering the objectives of the study. Likert scale was used in questions which tested on the degree of the respondents' agreement with particular variables of the study.

Top level management were contacted to affirm the intention for carrying out the study on the organization and to clarify the significant of the study and the commitment required from the management. Research assistants were employed to administer the questionnaires which were dropped to each respondent and picked later after two weeks. The researcher made a follow up through phone calls and in addition, visited the respondents before the stated period to remind them on the importance of responding to the questionnaire. This study obtained both quantitative data and qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation and presented in tables, charts and graphs. The study used Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the level of significant of the variables on the dependent variable at 95% confidence level. In addition, the study conducted a multiple regression analysis to test the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The regression equation was:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Whereby Y = Performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya

X_1 = Staff Training

X_2 = ICT Deployment

X_3 = Customer Relationship Management

X_4 = Strategic Partnership Management

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ are coefficients of determination

ε is the error term.

7. DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

Regression analysis was used to model, examine, and explore the relationships between the independent variables (staff training, ICT deployment, customer relationship management and strategic partner's management) and the dependent variable (performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya) used for the study, this was important in measuring the extent to which changes in one or more variables jointly affected changes in another variable.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.742 ^a	.620	.813	.675	.020	.600	4	93	.000 ^a

a. Predictors: (Constant), staff training, ICT deployment, customer relationship management and strategic partner's management

The value of R in the model was 0.742 showing a very strong correlation between the independent variables studied on the dependent variable. The study further showed R-square (0.620) which measured the proportion of the variation in the dependent variable that was explained by variations in the independent variables. The four independent variables that

were studied, explain 81.3% of performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya as represented by the adjusted R squared. This therefore means that other factors not studied in this research contribute 18.7%. Therefore, further research should be conducted to address this gap.

Table 2: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.092	4	2.273	11.600	.000 ^a
	Residual	53.277	89	1.455		
	Total	54.369	93	3.728		

a. Predictors: (Constant), staff training, ICT deployment, customer relationship management and strategic partner's management

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of Postal Corporation

The significance value is 0.000^a which is less than 0.05 thus the model is statistically significance in predicting how various factors affect performance of mobile payment services in Kenya. The F critical at 5% level of significance was 2.273. Since F calculated is greater than the F critical (value = 11.600), this shows that the overall model was significant. The relationship ($p < 0.05$) indicated a linear relationship among the variables under the study meaning there was 95percent chance that the relationship among the variables was not due to chance.

Table 3: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0percent Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	.357	.651		7.308	.000	3.468	6.047
Staff training	.807	.052	4.012	1.134	.004	.110	.096
ICT Deployment	.629	.049	3.058	4.592	.001	.125	.067
Customer Relationship Management	.750	.121	2.040	2.412	.001	.190	.290
Strategic Partner's Management	.572	.053	4.128	3.352	.000	.177	.033

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Postal Corporation

Table 3 shows the constant in this model is represented by a value of 0.357, which is the expected value of performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya when the values of the independent variables are equal to zero. Based on the analysis, the regression equation for the independent variable on the dependent variable resulted to the following; $Y = 0.357 + 0.807X_1 + 0.629X_2 + 0.750X_3 + 0.572X_4$. Where Y = Performance of Postal Corporation, X_1 = Staff Training, X_2 = ICT Deployment, X_3 = Customer Relationship Management and X_4 = Strategic Partner's Management.

Table 3 also shows that staff training, ICT deployment, customer relationship management and strategic partner's management had a positive and significant effect on performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya as indicated by their beta (β) values. The relationships ($p < 0.05$) are all significant with cost staff training ($\beta = 4.012$, $p < 0.05$), ICT deployment ($\beta = 3.058$, $p < 0.05$), Customer relationship management ($\beta = 2.040$, $p < 0.05$) and strategic partner's management ($\beta = 4.128$, $p < 0.05$). Staff training was found to be the most 80.7% significant among the four variables followed by customer relationship management 75.0%, ICT deployment 62.9% and strategic partner's management 57.2%. According to Evans, Pucik and Barsoux (2012) argue that organizations are facing increased competition due to globalization, changes in technology, political and economic environments and therefore prompting these organizations to train their employees as one of the ways to prepare them to adjust to the increases above and thus enhance their performance. Werthner and Klein (2015) indicates that ICT is considered as a tool of marketing, contacting customers and looking for possible customers, as well as presenting ICT services as distinguished potential services for customers. Customer relationship management (CRM) is increasingly important to firms as they seek to improve their profits through longer-term relationships with customers. CRM represents a strategy for creating value for both the firm and its customers through the appropriate use of technology, data and customer knowledge (Payne & Frow, 2015). Maurrasse (2013) indicates that the concept of strategic partnership is necessitated by the need for an organization to achieve its goals while leveraging on resources of another organization. Typically, strategic partnership can be viewed as a tool for competitive advantage.

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that staff training has a positive and significant effect on the performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya. The study concludes that that the company conducts training to enhance superior skills, knowledge and capabilities; Staff training equips staff to execute duties and responsibilities efficiently; There is improved staff performance as a result of staff; Staff training programs incorporate the interests of organization and the workforce; and Staff training has achieved high morale with increased confidence and motivation. The study concludes that ICT Deployment has a positive and significant effect on the performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya. The study further concludes that that ICT has improved business processes and changed the function of markets; ICT deployment has led to drastic improvement in productivity and reduction in costs; Technological forecasting has helped protect and improve the profitability; The company keeps tabs on probable future advances in ICT that can affect its products and services, ICT deployment has helped monitor impending challenges and promising opportunities in the market.

The study concludes that customer relationship management has a positive and significant effect on the performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya. The study also concludes that The company has spending on CRM geared at increasing efficiency Competition has enabled the organizations to build more contacts and sustain relationships with customers and that CRM has led to provision of services and products that our customers want ,CRM has leveraged on ICT to build long term relationship with our customers strengths. The study concludes that strategic partner's management has a positive and significant effect on the performance of Postal Corporation of Kenya. The study finally concludes that The company has established strategic alliances and cooperation with other firms; Strategic partners' management has helped the company accomplishes new market development; The company has made up its shortages in technology and manufacturing through strategic partnerships; Strategic partnership management perfected the effect of the supply chain thus achieving market share;

and Strategic partnerships has helped scale the company's economies and strengthened its domestic and international competitiveness.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that organizations should endeavor to train its staff. Training is necessary to ensure an adequate supply of staff that is technically and socially competent and capable of career development geared towards helping organizations realize their vision. In the contemporary dynamic corporate world, employees are increasingly required to keep up to the upcoming changes. Training is important for employees' development as it enables them achieve self-fulfilling skills and abilities, reduce operational costs, limits organizational liabilities. The study also recommends the use of ICT in the organizations. Information technology has become strategic in helping improve business processes and change the function of markets. It is therefore necessary for organizations to continue their efforts in developing and implementing the up-to-date technology. The study finally recommends the incorporation of CRM as it streamlines the organizational structure so that it improves and survives in the market. Also, CRM is considered a structure that gives support to the disadvantage of the competition. This creates value organization and the customers, enabling them to gain excellent benefits.

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