

# EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF STRATEGY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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## Abstract

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In general, an effective strategic management process allows managers to interact with employees in formulating and implementing organisational strategic plans (Nedelea & Paun, 2009). Eskom, an electricity public utility company, in South Africa, suffered a strategy formulation and implementation fatigue for the past two decades leading to a quagmire and lacklustre performance of all time (“Eskom CEOs from 1985 to 2020”, 2020). Therefore, the study investigates employees’ perception of the organisational strategy process towards bridging the gap between the management and non-management employees in strategy formulation and implementation. The study employed a quantitative survey, gathering data from a sample of 331 participants randomly selected from a population of 2400 Eskom, employees. Data was then collected and captured through a questionnaire using an online survey tool called Question Pro and analysed with SPSS version 25. The study revealed that Eskom’s strategic formulation and implementation process was perceived by employees as a downward communication process. Thus, the study revealed that there was a lack of employee engagement before and after the strategy formulation and in implementation process. The study therefore recommended that Eskom should employ a vertical two-way communication process between managerial and non-managerial employees. In addition, the study recommended that Eskom should provide strategy awareness campaigns at ground level towards positively impacting on sustainable and effective strategy implementation.

**Keywords:** Eskom, Strategy, Strategic Formulation, Strategic Implementation, Strategic Management

**Authors’ individual contribution:** Conceptualization — T.A.H.; Methodology — L.N.; Validation — T.A.H.; Formal Analysis — E.M.; Investigation — T.A.H.; Writing — Original Draft — E.M.; Writing — Review & Editing — E.M. and L.N.; Supervision — E.M.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Eskom is the electricity public utility company responsible for generating approximately 95% of the electricity used in South Africa and nearly 40% of the electricity used in Africa, making the utility company a key strategic organisation for the entire continent (Deloitte, 2013). Eskom has the sole transmission licence in South Africa and hence is responsible for the development and maintenance of the country's transmission and distribution infrastructure (Department of Energy [DoE], 2022).

Inglesi-Lotz and Blignaut (2014) however, argue that the utility company faces serious power generation challenges, external environment dynamics and internal resources capacity because of inconsistencies in the organisation's overall strategy formulation and implementation practices. In addition, Khumalo (2019) reports that the utility company's ineffective strategy formulation and implementation practices over the years could have led to one of Eskom's worst debt crises of approximately 435 billion South African rand (ZAR), with load shedding affecting all South African cities and communities. To the contrary, these negative developments have happened at a time when the consumption of electricity has dropped on average by approximately half a percent annually since 2006 due to various factors that include slow economic growth, volatility of the commodity market and the increasing cost of electricity and lack of supply security (DoE, 2022). On the other hand, the increased competition brought by renewables, wider customer choice and new technologies have drastically changed the electricity consumption patterns of South Africa, compelling Eskom to address the challenges by crafting a strategy formulation and implementation pathway towards solving these problems (Odeku, 2013). These strategic imperatives support the purpose and vision elements of the organisation, outline the strategic direction and guide the organisation in overcoming its current and foreseeable challenges. The organisation is therefore faced with the responsibility of transforming these strategic imperatives to attainable strategic goals through effective strategy implementation. Strategic management deals with decisions and actions resulting in the formulation and implementation of strategic plans intended to realize organisational strategic objectives (Pearce & Robinson, 2011). The strategy initially is designed at the head office level and funnelled through to each region using Eskom's organisational structure. Due to differences in their interest, there is a perception gap between the formulation and its implementation among the employee types. According to past research (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2010; Mankins & Steele, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Kaplan & Norton, 2008), only about thirty-three percent (33%) of the formulated strategies are effectively implemented due to misperceptions by Eskom employees. In this regard, this study focuses on examining the perception of strategy formulation and implementation at Eskom and on moving the organisation towards sustainable strategic management.

It is critical to note that before 2007, Eskom was classed as one of the leading producers of electricity worldwide. It was so effective and

efficient that by the end of 1990, it had supplied more than half of Africa's electricity. Due to its efficient processes and systems, Eskom is sighted in the 1994 annual report as the lowest-cost electricity producer in the world (Eskom, 1994). Looking at the present day, 2023, this once highly efficient, profitable, well-managed, stable producer of electricity now fails to produce enough electricity to keep the country's lights on. This is costing the economy billions of ZAR financially and crippling economic growth, investor confidence, and compromising on service delivery (Laing, 2003; Cronje, 2020). Bonorchis and Burkhardt (2017) declared Eskom as the biggest risk to South Africa's economy. With the COVID-19 virus pandemic bringing the global economy to almost a standstill and stock markets crashing, one has to ask if the key drivers of this complex organisation are of the right fit and skill to take the utility forward in a market; that is so volatile, unpredictable, and uncertain. With the South African economy under such immense strain, the government cannot afford further bailouts to the utility in the future. Business, as usual, can never be the same in South Africa post the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

It is also critical to note that from 1985 to 2007, 22 years, Eskom was led by only three chief executive officers (CEOs), and from 2000 to 2007, that is within seven years, it had a total of thirteen CEOs, causing increasing unpredictability, volatility and uncertainty in strategy formulation and implementation, where scheduled load-shedding, growing fraud levels and escalating debt characterised Eskom from 2008 to 2020 ("Eskom CEOs from 1985 to 2020", 2020).

The instability in CEOs' positions has not been the only senior position at Eskom that has had a high turnover rate. There have been six chairmen in the last ten years compared to only three over 20 years when Eskom was known to be a profitable energy producer ("Eskom CEOs from 1985 to 2020", 2020).

With the surmounting challenges (financial, operational and governance) plaguing Eskom and with the previous CEOs tenure (mainly from 2013-2018) being tarnished with lack of compliance of governance policies and regulations, contravention of fiduciary duties, corruption and fraud and lack of accountability and transparency, a new board of directors were appointed in 2018 to address the dire financial status, diminishing revenue and governance problems. The board were unaware of the underlying contributing factors to these ills (Omarjee, 2019).

With Eskom supplying 95% of the nation's electricity, bankruptcy is not an option as the entire economy will fall. The South African government assured the nation that Eskom was an important entity which should not be allowed to fail (Cohen et al., 2019).

However, years of leadership failure in dealing effectively with political interference, mismanagement, inept leadership, corruption, inadequate and uninformed decision-making have led to the destruction of this once profit-making entity that contributed to the South African economic growth, driving it to the brink of almost total shutdown. The rapidly changing business landscape has added to this conundrum, where

previous leadership models and styles have become archaic. A new type of leadership is required as the traditional leadership methods will not suffice.

Taking the challenges plaguing Eskom into context with globalisation, unpredictable economic trends and customer needs that are continually changing, there is growing evidence to indicate that organisations, government, and state-owned enterprises like Eskom are now acknowledging the importance of strategy formulation and implementation on service delivery (Avolio et al., 2009; McCarthy et al., 2011; Muchiri, 2011; Muchiri et al., 2011; Veliu et al., 2017).

Based on these views, the study sought to investigate the employee perceptions of strategy formulation and implementation towards sustainable strategic management at Eskom, in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

Following this introductory section, the structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research, Section 4 provides a discussion of results, and Section 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Conditions for strategy formulation and implementation

According to Farjoun and Fiss (2021), companies that include power generation are characterized by both stability and change. Forces such as apathy, reduction of uncertainty, cost-cutting and cultivation of social capital foster stability, while other forces such as the need to adjust to the environment, control costs, sustain competitive advantage and satisfy impatient capital markets, demand continuous change. Sievinen et al. (2022) suggest that many deliberate changes have to take place within the organisation for the strategy to be implemented successfully. Strategy, as defined by Sievinen et al. (2022), entails a theory which deals with how an organisation competes successfully by providing satisfactory performance. In addition, the authors portrayed strategy as an action plan that management takes to achieve its goals to bring about the desired future organisational performance. This is supported by Bindra et al. (2019) who argue that strategy refers to a set of decisions in an organisation that determines its objectives, purpose, goals, and plans for accomplishing those goals. Corporate-level strategy details the overall strategic direction of the organisation in terms of survival, growth and profitability. However, business-level strategy is usually concerned with the improvement of the firm's product or service, and functional-level strategy is the approach that the business takes to achieve corporate and business unit objectives (Farjoun & Fiss, 2021). According to Wheelen and Hunger (2012), strategy formulation is concerned with developing long-term plans for the effective management of environmental threats and opportunities, taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. It incorporates defining the organisation's mission, and vision, specifying of attainable objectives,

development of strategies and setting policy guidelines. In support of this, Venter (2014) also suggested that formulation typically involves senior management who carry out environmental analysis inside and outside the organisation. Further, the aforementioned points out that formulation involves the setting of the strategic direction for the organisation, i.e., deciding on the organisational future and setting strategic goals that will allow the organisation to transition to the envisioned future state.

On the other hand, strategy implementation is the transformation of organisational strategy into action in order for the organisation to achieve its strategic goals and objectives through its structure, control systems and culture to execute strategies that lead to better performance (Waters & Waters, 2006). This transformation might include a change of the overall organisational structure, culture, and the entire management system. Middle and lower-level managers typically execute this stage of the strategic management process with the implementation review done by top senior management (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2011) state that implementing and executing strategy are concerned with applying precise techniques, actions, and behaviours that are required for an effective strategy-supportive operation and then following through to ensure that goals are met results are delivered.

Nedelea and Paun (2009) state that strategy formulation and implementation is not a once-off task during this step of the process. Circumstances that require adjustment, may arise. This is supported by Ciobanica (2014) who points out that evaluation and control are aimed at checking if all efforts support the smooth implementation of the formulated strategy. In other words, evaluation is concerned with measuring the results of actions undertaken while control focuses more on comparisons between the desired state and the results obtained. In general, effective strategic management has become the most significant challenge for management in many organisations (Saunders et al., 2008). Frynas and Mellahi (2015), suggest that to achieve efficient strategic management, a linear and logical process has to be followed. However, Stoney (2001) argues that strategic management is much more complex than that. This researcher suggests that when strategic management is considered from a sociological point of view, its influence goes beyond just strategic analysis, planning and implementation but rather it affects all aspects of an organisation, inclusive of structure and empowerment of employees at different levels within the organisation. Jasper and Crossan (2012) state that integrating strategic management activities into all organisational functions is one way of bridging the gap between the intended strategy and its effective execution. According to Venter (2014), strategic management is a complex process that is dynamic and interrelated. Formulation decisions impact directly on strategy implementation, which in turn impacts directly on strategic control (Venter, 2014). Mintzberg (1994) states that more than half of formulated strategies are never actually implemented. This is supported by Miller (2002) who points out that, as much as seventy percent (70%) of organisations fail to implement their formulated strategies. Similarly,

Mankins and Steele (2005) state that about forty to sixty percent (40%-60%) of the potential value of a strategic plan is never realized due to inefficiencies in the formulation and implementation of the strategy. One of the reasons, for the inefficiency of the formulation and implementation of strategy, lies in the treatment of different employee types in the same manner. According to Jones et al. (2008), the non-management and management staff showed more negative attitudes toward change and referred more to conflict and divisions as compared to executives. Furthermore, they found that executives and management staff tended to focus more on planning challenges and potential outcomes of the change than did non-management staff. Finally, compared to other staff, executives focused more on participation in the change process and communication about the change process. In the case of Eskom, the executives were sitting at the head office and the regional managers and employees were all over the regions causing a difference in the perceptions of employees-type on strategic formulation and implementation and how Eskom in KwaZulu-Natal can avoid this challenge. Therefore, a great need for more in-depth study on tools for successfully transforming strategic goals into action for the organisation to effectively implement strategy and achieve sustainable strategic management.

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

The study draws from the strategic management framework as espoused by Wheelen and Hunger, (2012) when they argue that the process encompasses a string of interconnected phases that include environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation in which executives and employees are key players. Drawing from this, Eskom could employ that strategic management process, engaging employees and other stakeholders towards ensuring sustainable performance. Below are the theoretical assumptions and views regarding the process.

## 2.3. Strategy and strategic management overview

Hughes et al. (2014) suggest that strategic management can be viewed as an array of deliberate and evolving actions that result in the reality of strategy implementation and achievement. According to Pettinger (2004), the significance of organizational strategy and strategic management is securing the long-term future for the organization. Traditionally, the strategic management process consists of four basic sequential elements that include environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012).

## 2.4. Environmental scanning

According to Wheelen and Hunger (2012), environmental scanning is concerned with the monitoring, evaluating, and circulating of critical information from both internal and external environments to employees within the organisation to identify strategic factors that will determine the future of the organization. Hough et al. (2011)

support this by suggesting that a comprehensive environmental analysis of both internal and external environment is critical in addressing issues that might impact on achieving the organizational vision. This insightful diagnosis of the environment is a prerequisite for managers to succeed in crafting and aligning a strategy that is an excellent fit with that organisation's situation. Similarly, Henry (2011) points out that the reason for scanning and monitoring the environment is to try to detect changes, however small, that could potentially disrupt the organisation's competitive environment.

## 2.5. Strategy formulation

Strategy formulation is the development of plans for the effective management of opportunities and risks or threats based on the organisational strengths and weaknesses. Defining the mission, specifying of attainable objectives, developing strategies, and setting of policy guidelines all form part of strategy formulation (Pearce & Robinson, 2011; Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). This is supported by Venter (2014) who suggests that formulation typically involves senior management who carry out environmental analysis inside the organization and externally that is the environment, which the organization operates within. Further, he points out that formulation involves setting of the strategic direction for the organization, that is deciding on the organizational future and setting the strategic goals that will get the organization to the envisioned future state.

According to Wheelen and Hunger (2012), the mission is the main reason for the existence of the organisation and the objectives state what is to be accomplished for the organisation to fulfil its mission and strategy forms an all-inclusive master plan asserting how the organization will realize its mission and objectives. Typically, an organization will consider three levels of strategy which include corporate strategy, business strategy, and functional strategy (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). Corporate-level strategy details the overall strategic direction of the organization in terms of survival, growth, and profitability. Business level strategy is usually concerned with improvement of the firm's product or service and functional level strategy is the approach that the business takes to achieve corporate and business unit objectives (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012).

## 2.6. Strategy implementation

Strategy implementation involves the transformation of strategies and policies through the development of procedures, programs, and budgets. This transformation might include a change of the overall organizational structure, culture, and the entire management system. Middle and lower-level managers typically execute this stage of the strategic management process with the implementation review done by top senior management (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). Similarly, Thompson et al. (2011) state that implementing and executing strategy is concerned with applying precise techniques, actions, and behaviours that are required for an effective strategy-supportive operation and then following through to ensure that things are done and delivering the results.

## 2.7. Evaluation and control

Nedelea and Paun (2019) state that strategy formulation and implementation is not a once-off task, during this step of the process, circumstances that require adjustment, may arise. Strategy may need to be altered because the implementation is not going well or because changes in the environment necessitate fine-tuning or even major overhaul of the process. It is therefore necessary for management to monitor and evaluate if the chosen strategy is working well and how well is implementation progressing, adjusting whenever there are deviations or whenever an improved way of doing things is discovered and supported. According to Wheelen and Hunger (2012), corporate activities and performance are monitored through evaluation and control for actual performance to be compared with the desired performance. Using the resulting information, managers take corrective action and resolve issues. Evaluation and control is the last stage of the strategy implementation process however it can identify the flaws in previously implemented strategic plans and therefore stimulating the entire process to start again. This is supported by Ciobanica (2014) who points out that evaluation and control is aimed at checking if all efforts support the smooth implementation of the formulated strategy, evaluation is concerned with measuring of the results of actions undertaken while control looks more into comparing between the desired state and the results obtained.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two main research methods which include the quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative research aligns with the positivistic philosophy, whereas qualitative research aligns with the phenomenological philosophy (Bryman et al., 2014). Quantitative research relies on numbers, measurements, and calculations, and tends to be more highly structured and scientific in approach than qualitative research. In contrast, qualitative research relies on detailed narrations by respondents to gain insight into a particular problem. Qualitative research is a more systematic, subjective approach to problem-solving and tends to be less structured than quantitative research (Mackey & Gass, 2022).

This study employed the quantitative method since it relies on numbers, measurements, and calculations, is highly structured and scientific in

approach than qualitative research towards enhancing the overall quality and validity of the findings. The target population was all the 2,400 Eskom employees located in KwaZulu-Natal, in both managerial and non-managerial staff groups. By using a random probability sampling technique, a sample of 331 employees was chosen. The study employed a quantitative research method using a survey. The data was collected and captured through a questionnaire using an online survey tool called Question Pro and analysed with SPSS version 25. To effectively examine the employees' perception of the strategy formulation and implementation, a funnelling technique was used to develop a total of twenty-five questions that comprised of twenty-four closed-ended questions and the responses were rated with a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree, and one open-ended question. The questions were developed and linked to the study's objective. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) which is a collection of statistical models and their associated estimation procedures was used to analyze the differences among means. It is based on the law of total variance, where the observed variance in a particular variable is partitioned into components attributable to different sources of variation. In its simplest form, it provides a statistical test of whether two or more population means are equal and therefore generalizes the t-test beyond two means.

## 4. RESULTS

Two hundred and ninety-one of the three hundred and thirty-one participants returned the completed questionnaires which represented an 87.91% response rate. Seventy-three questionnaires were excluded due to missing data. Saunders et al. (2019) consider a response rate of forty to fifty percent adequate.

As shown in Table 1, the majority (61%) of the respondents were male while the remainder (39%) were female. Almost 80% of respondents were under the age of 45 years with the highest response (42.2%) obtained from respondents between the ages of 26 and 35 years. With regards to race group, nearly all (79.4%) of the participants were "black African", while 9.6% were "Indian" and the remaining 11.9% were of "white" and "coloured" origin. The majority (80.3%) of the respondents were non-management staff while the remaining 19.7% were from the management groups.

Table 1. Demographic of respondents

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Gender	Male	133	61.0	61.0	61.0
	Female	85	39.0	39.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Age group	18-25 years old	9	4.1	4.1	4.1
	26-35 years old	92	42.2	42.2	46.3
	36-45 years old	73	33.5	33.5	79.8
	> 45 years old	44	20.2	20.2	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Race group	African	173	79.4	79.4	79.4
	White	19	8.7	8.7	88.1
	Indian	21	9.6	9.6	97.7
	Coloured	5	2.3	2.3	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Employment type	Non-management	175	80.3	80.3	80.3
	Management	24	11.0	11.0	91.3
	Top management	19	8.7	8.7	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Primary data.

**Table 2.** Perception of employees on sustainable strategic formulation

<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Response %</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>
The organisation uses downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees.	Agree	62%	3.78	0.807
The organisation defines strategic goals that are geared towards the mission and vision statements.	Agree	60%	3.76	0.792
The organisation defines the mission and vision statements as the first step in formulating its strategy.	Agree	64%	3.75	0.927
The organisation uses terminology that has a standardized meaning across all functions of the organisation.	Agree	58%	3.58	0.933
The organisation uses simplified and easy-to-understand methods when communicating its strategic plan to all its employees.	Agree	49%	3.47	1.008
Prior to formulating a new strategic plan, the organisation assesses its available resources.	Agree	46%	3.40	1.035
The existing resources complement the strategic intention of the organisation.	Agree	40%	3.15	1.068
The organisation uses two-way communication when communicating its strategy to the employees.	Disagree	64%	2.99	1.069

Source: Primary data.

The respondents were asked to indicate to what degree they agreed or disagreed on a five-stage Likert scale with the following statements with regard to the strategy formulation attributes.

As indicated in Table 2, the highest-ranking mean value of 3.78 with a standard deviation of 0.807 indicates that the majority (62%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that “the organisation uses downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees”. The second highest-ranking mean value is 3.76 with a standard deviation of 0.792, which indicates that the respondents (60%) agreed that the organisation defines strategic goals that are geared towards the mission and vision statements. Following this is the statement with a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 0.927, which states, “the organisation defines the mission and vision statements as the first step in formulating its strategy”. Sixty percent (64%) of the respondents agreed with this statement. Additionally, 58% of respondents (mean = 3.58, std. dev. = 0.933) agreed that the organisation uses terminology that has a standardized meaning across all functions of the organisation.

According to the findings of the study on the employees' perception, the Eskom management defined the organisation's vision and mission as the first step in formulating a strategy. This is supported by Ciobanica (2014) who suggests that in order to formulate a solid strategic plan that will enable successful implementation, an organisation first has to establish the vision and agree on a mission. Based on the findings, once the vision and mission had been defined, the organisation established strategic goals that were geared towards these two critical elements of strategic management using terminology that has a standardized meaning across all functions of the organisation. The issue, according to the employees' perception, however, is with the communication of the strategy. The majority (62%) of the respondents indicated that the organisation used downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees. According to Beer and Eisenstat (2000), this type of vertical communication used by executives to management and non-management employees is an obstacle to effective strategic formulation.

The bottom four ranking mean values were 3.47, 3.40, 3.15, and 2.99 for respondents who agreed that: 1) the organisation uses simplified and easy-to-understand methods when communicating its strategic plan to all its employees; 2) prior to

formulating a new strategic plan, the organisation assesses its available resources; 3) the existing resources complement the strategic intention of the organisation; and 4) the organisation uses two-way communication when communicating its strategy to the employees respectively. These factors are all critical in effective strategic management and were referred to by Mankins and Steele (2005) as tactical means of bridging the gap between strategy formulation and implementation. For strategy to be effective, it has to be simple, concrete, and the deployment of available resources should be done at an early stage.

The majority (64%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the organisation uses two-way communication systems when communicating its strategy to the employees. This corresponds with the earlier finding that the organisation used downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees, which is a serious issue, as already alluded to above. Heracleous (2003) suggests that one of the reasons why strategies fail is a lack of support and commitment by the majority of employees and middle management simply because they do not feel they have been consulted in the development of strategies in the organisation. To this effect, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted (Table 3) to explore the impact of employment type on the strategic formulation, as measured by the strategic formulation attributes.

Participants were divided into three groups according to their employment type:

- Group 1: non-management;
- Group 2: management;
- Group 3: top-management.

There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level for five of the strategic formulation attribute scores for the three employment groups (prior to formulating a new strategic plan the organisation assesses its available resources:  $F(2, 215) = 16.639$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ; the existing resources complement the strategic intention of the organisation:  $F(2, 215) = 22.596$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ; the organisation uses simplified and easy-to-understand methods when communicating its strategic plan to all its employees:  $F(2, 215) = 19.616$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ; the organisation uses terminology that has a standardized meaning across all functions of the organisation:  $F(2, 215) = 11.958$ ,  $p = 0.00$  and the organisation uses two-way communication when communicating its strategy to the employees:  $F(2, 215) = 12.094$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ).

**Table 3.** Perception of employees on strategic formulation by employment type (ANOVA)

Attributes		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
The organisation defines the mission and vision statements as the first step in formulating its strategy.	Between employment type	2.560	2	1.280	1.495	0.227
	Within groups	184.064	215	0.856		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>186.624</b>	<b>217</b>			
Prior to formulating a new strategic plan the organisation assesses its available resources.	Between employment type	31.134	2	15.567	16.639	0.000
	Within groups	201.146	215	0.936		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>232.280</b>	<b>217</b>			
The existing resources complement the strategic intention of the organisation.	Between employment type	42.954	2	21.477	22.596	0.000
	Within groups	204.349	215	0.950		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247.303</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation defines strategic goals that are geared towards the mission and vision statements.	Between employment type	2.767	2	1.384	2.231	0.110
	Within groups	133.347	215	0.620		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>136.115</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation uses simplified and easy-to-understand methods when communicating its strategic plan to all its employees.	Between employment type	34.001	2	17.000	19.616	0.000
	Within groups	186.334	215	0.867		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>220.335</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation uses terminology that has a standardized meaning across all functions of the organisation.	Between employment type	18.920	2	9.460	11.958	0.000
	Within groups	170.094	215	0.791		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>189.014</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation uses two-way communication when communicating its strategy to the employees.	Between employment type	25.077	2	12.539	12.094	0.000
	Within groups	222.904	215	1.037		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>247.982</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation uses downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees.	Between employment type	1.241	2	0.620	0.951	0.388
	Within groups	140.190	215	0.652		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>141.431</b>	<b>217</b>			

Source: Primary data.

Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups were quite small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was less than or equal to 0.02 for all attributes. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) test indicated that the mean score for non-management staff was significantly different from top management for five of the attributes. In all of the five attributes, the mean scores of the non-management employees were higher than both the management and the top management employees. Group 2 (management) did not differ significantly from either the non-management or top-management staff for the attributes that showed statistical significance differences. The three attributes that showed no statistical difference at the  $p > 0.05$  level of the strategic formulation attributes scores for the three employment groups were:

1) “the organisation defines the mission and vision statements as the first step in formulating its strategy” ( $p = 0.227$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 1.495$ );

2) “the organisation defines strategic goals that are geared towards the mission and vision statements” ( $p = 0.110$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 2.231$ );

3) “the organisation uses downward communication when communicating its strategy to the employees” ( $p = 0.388$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 0.951$ ).

With regard to the critical implementation success factors, the respondents were asked to indicate to what degree they agreed or disagreed on a five-stage Likert scale. The results (Table 4) indicated that a substantial portion (44%) of respondents (mean = 3.39 and std. dev. = 0.873) agreed that the organisation has alternative means of implementing strategy and achieving its goals. The next ranking mean value of 3.30 and standard deviation of 1.076 showed that the respondents agreed that, both management and staff are held accountable for the successful implementation of the strategy of the strategy within the organisation. This was collaborated by the next ranking mean of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 0.960, which indicated that thirty-eight percent (38%) of the respondents agreed that each member of the management team has responsibilities mapped to strategy implementation, which obviously comes with accountability.

**Table 4.** Perception of employees on sustainable strategic implementation

Attributes	Response	Response %	Mean	Std. dev.
An organisation has alternative means of implementing strategy and achieving its strategic goals.	Agree	44%	3.39	0.873
Both management and staff are held accountable for successful implementation of the strategy plan in organisation.	Agree	48%	3.3	1.076
Each member of the management team has clear responsibilities mapped to strategy implementation.	Agree	38%	3.26	0.96
The business gradually implements the plan in stages, instead of implementing the strategy throughout the organisation.	Agree	41%	3.25	0.945
Managers are allowed flexibility to customize the strategic plan for their specific departmental functions to aid effective implementation.	Agree	35%	3.2	0.987
Management creates a conducive work environment to promote effective strategy implementation.	Agree	40%	3.15	0.967
Management promotes the feeling of vested interest in the strategy implementation processes and programs.	Agree	35%	3.08	0.948
The organisation engages employees prior to implementing its strategy.	Disagree	41%	2.77	1.049

Source: Primary data.

Based on these findings, the organisation allows some strategy implementation flexibility; all employees including management are held accountable for the successful implementation of strategy; and each member of the management has clear responsibilities mapped to strategy implementation. Hill and Jones (2012) suggest that, for strategy implementation to be effective, the structure of the organisation should synchronize and integrate strategy with the tasks performed by all employees, at all levels and across all divisions and functions. The goal should be to align the organisational structure so that it fits with the strategy requirements. Cocks (2010) points out that the strategy should be broken down into activities and that tasks should be clearly defined and linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation in order to effectively execute the strategy. The next ranking mean was 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.945, which showed that the respondents agreed that the business gradually implements the plan in stages, instead of implementing the strategy throughout the organisation. This is followed by a statement with a mean value of 3.20 and a standard deviation

of 0.987 which is that “managers are allowed flexibility to customize the strategic plan for their specific departmental functions to aid effective implementation”. This tallied with the gradual implementation of the strategic plan since managers were allowed some implementation flexibility. The least-ranking statements had mean values of 3.15, 3.08 and 2.77 with standard deviations of 0.967, 0.948 and 1.049 respectively. With these statements, respondents agreed that management creates a work environment conducive to promoting effective strategy implementation and that management promotes the feeling of vested interest in the strategy implementation processes. However, forty-one percent (41%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that “the organisation engages employees prior to implementing its strategy”. This could be linked to the findings that the organisation uses downward communication with no two-way interaction or engagement. One of the reasons why effective implementation efforts fail as identified by Heracleous (2003) is that executives at the head office spend insufficient time on communicating and selling the new strategy direction and managing the organisational change involved.

**Table 5.** Perception of employees on sustainable strategic implementation by employees type (ANOVA)

<i>Employee perceptions</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	
The organisation engages employees prior to implementing its strategy.	Between employment type	22.281	2	11.140	11.180	0.000
	Within groups	214.238	215	0.996		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>236.518</b>	<b>217</b>			
Management promotes the feeling of vested interest in the strategy implementation processes and programs.	Between employment type	3.968	2	1.984	2.286	<b>0.104</b>
	Within groups	186.605	215	0.868		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>190.573</b>	<b>217</b>			
Management creates a work environment conducive to promoting effective strategy implementation.	Between employment type	8.206	2	4.103	4.598	<b>0.011</b>
	Within groups	191.849	215	0.892		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200.055</b>	<b>217</b>			
Both management and staff are held accountable for the successful implementation of the strategy plan in the organisation.	Between employment type	6.365	2	3.182	2.790	<b>0.064</b>
	Within groups	245.254	215	1.141		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>251.619</b>	<b>217</b>			
Each member of the management team has clear responsibilities mapped to strategy implementation.	Between employment type	13.892	2	6.946	8.184	0.000
	Within groups	182.475	215	0.849		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>196.367</b>	<b>217</b>			
Managers are allowed flexibility to customize the strategic plan for their specific departmental functions to aid effective implementation.	Between employment type	4.800	2	2.400	2.536	<b>0.082</b>
	Within groups	203.493	215	0.946		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>208.294</b>	<b>217</b>			
The organisation has alternative means of implementing strategy and achieving its strategic goals.	Between employment type	14.185	2	7.093	10.188	0.000
	Within groups	149.673	215	0.696		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>163.858</b>	<b>217</b>			

Source: Primary data.

In this instance (Table 5), participants were divided again into three groups according to their employment type (Group 1: non-management; Group 2: management; Group 3: top management). There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level for three of the strategic implementation attribute scores: 1) the organisation engages employees prior to implementing its strategy:  $F(2, 215) = 11.180$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ; 2) each member of the management team has clear responsibilities mapped to strategy implementation  $F(2, 215) = 8.184$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ; and 3) the organisation has alternative means of implementing strategy and achieving its strategic goals:  $F(2, 215) = 10.188$ ,  $p = 0.00$ . Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups were quite small. The effect size,

calculated using eta squared, was less than or equal to 0.03 for all attributes. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for non-management staff was significantly different from management and top management for the engagement of employees prior to the implementation of the strategy attribute. When it comes to the attribute regarding the management's clear responsibility mapping to the strategy implementation, there was a significant difference between the non-management and management staff. In the case of the attribute regarding the organisation having an alternate means of implementing strategy and achieving strategic goals, the non-management mean score was significantly different from both management and top management staff. The four attributes that showed



no statistical difference at the  $p > 0.01$  level of the strategic formulation attributes scores for the three employment groups, were:

1) "management promotes the feeling of vested interest in the strategy implementation processes and programs" ( $p = 0.104$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 2.286$ );

2) "management creates a work environment conducive to promoting effective strategy implementation" ( $p = 0.011$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 4.598$ );

3) "both management and staff are held accountable for the successful implementation of the strategy plan in the organisation" ( $p = 0.064$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 2.790$ );

4) "managers are allowed flexibility to customize the strategic plan for their specific departmental functions to aid effective implementation" ( $p = 0.082$ ;  $F(2, 215) = 2.536$ ).

Hough et al. (2011) suggest that for an organisation to implement and successfully execute strategy, management should engage with staff to communicate the case for organisational change so distinctly and convincingly that a firm commitment takes hold throughout the ranks to find ways to implement strategy, make it work and meet performance targets. Failure of the organisation to communicate its vision, position and strategic plans to all its employees creates perception gaps leading to ineffective implementation. Thompson (2001) stresses the importance of employee participation and involvement in strategic management at all levels; he points out that people who are consulted and involved in strategy formulation are more likely to support strategic changes necessary to implement strategy successfully.

The most dominant responses were around planning, communication and engagement, as well as monitoring. Two of these elements are directly linked to the strategic management process which consists of four main steps, that is, environmental scanning, strategy formulation (planning), strategy implementation, as well as evaluation and control (monitoring). The lack of consideration of the elements therefore is an indication of a breakdown in the strategic management process within an organisation. With regard to planning, the concerns were around succession planning, resources planning, setting of attainable goals and the involvement of employees in strategy planning. Heracleous (2003) suggests that one of the reasons for strategy failure is that the strategy does not correspond to market and the organisation's realities because it was developed by strategic planners who had no input from the 'grassroots'. This highlights the vital role employees at ground level play in planning and formulating a good strategy. In this research, it is confirmed that the non-management staff favoured equally both the formulation and the implementation of the strategy at Eskom in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Cater and Pucko (2010), one fundamental challenge in effective strategy implementation is ensuring employees' buy-in and directing their capabilities. Therefore, communication and engagement are crucial according to their ranks. This is supported by Thompson (2001) who points out that the rationale for strategic change should be communicated in such a way that everyone in the organisation understands the need for and

the benefit of the new strategy. Lack of this communication may result in the misunderstanding of the underlying effect of the strategic changes. Korbi (2015) advises that management should set up a communication plan to address any staff queries, the profile of the organisation after the strategic change, and styles of leadership and behaviour, in order to strengthen the organisation during strategy implementation. Monitoring is a critical step in effectively implementing any plan as it identifies any shortcomings or deviations from the intended outcome. Nedelea and Paun (2009) suggest that strategy formulation and implementation are not a once-off task. During this step of the process, circumstances that require adjustment may arise. The strategy may need to be altered because the implementation is not going well or because changes in the environment necessitate fine-tuning or even a major overhaul of the process. It is, therefore, necessary for management to monitor and evaluate if the chosen strategy is working well for all employees and how well implementation is progressing and perceived by all employees, and adjusting whenever there are deviations or an improved way of doing things is discovered and supported by all stakeholders.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the perception of employees on strategy formulation and implementation. This was further evaluated by the employees type to find out if there were significant differences among them. The study concluded that the non-management staff are more supportive of both the formulation and implementation of the strategy at Eskom.

In addition, the study concluded that non-management, management and top management staff showed no differences in their perception that the organisation does define the mission and vision before strategy formulation, which sets the correct tone for sustainable strategic management and how it defines its goals which are geared towards the mission and vision. These are some of the critical success factors in strategy formulation as they demonstrate the alignment of actionable goals to the organisational strategy.

Furthermore, the study concluded that there were no significant differences in the perception of the three employment types with regard to the organisation's use of downward communication when communicating its strategy to them. Most of the employees indicated that the organisation has used downward communication, which is an indication of a lack of employee consultation during strategic planning.

The study also concludes that the formulation of the strategy is only influenced by the executives at the head office without any input from the ground level and yet the expectation is that employees have to execute and implement it. This is a gap that has the potential of resulting in disruption of the implementation efforts by employees since they might feel that the strategy is not the right fit for the organisation or they do not have the necessary skills to effectively implement the new strategy. For strategy to be sustainable, it has to be integrated into all functions of

the business suggesting that all parties have to be consulted right from the planning stages.

The study further concluded that there is a perception difference between the non-management, management, and top management employees when it comes to the capacity of the executives who designed the formulation and execution of the strategic plan. This is reflected by five strategic formulation attributes of the organisation. The non-management employees perceived that the executives at the head office have more capacity than the management and top-management staff at Eskom at KwaZulu-Natal.

In addition, the study concluded that all employees types of perception showed no difference in management creating a work environment conducive to promoting effective strategy implementation and their effort to promote the feeling of vested interest in the strategy implementation process and programs. Additionally, there was no significant difference in the employee types' perceptions with regard to holding employees accountable for the successful implementation of strategy, although they were not given an opportunity to influence the strategy during planning and formulation.

Winding off on conclusions, the study reveals that there was no significant difference in employee types of perceptions on how Eskom, KwaZulu-Natal can achieve sustainable strategic management. It was revealed that there are three main areas all employee types felt strongly about. First, they felt that there should be transparent, honest, and consistent communication from top management which would allow for the involvement of employees in decision-making. Secondly, it was highlighted that during the planning stages, the organisation should set realistic goals aligned to the available resources,

skills, and competencies and have a proper succession plan in place which would ensure uninterrupted strategy implementation. Thirdly, the view was that there should be reliable and routine strategy implementation reports and management should be more visible during implementation to build employee confidence in management and the organisational strategic intentions.

Based on the conclusions above, the study recommends that Eskom must introduce new policy measures that employ different approaches for different employee types in the use of a vertical two-way communication system that would allow the interaction and flow of information between managerial and non-managerial employees. This would close the communication gap and enable effective sustainable strategic management within the organisation.

In addition, that study recommends that Eskom should introduce new policy measures that employ the use of change agents that will engage employees across all phases of strategy formulation to evaluation towards successful and effective strategic changes.

Arising from the fact that the study examined organisational change only at one of the regional offices of Eskom. This study recommends that future research could be conducted in the entire organisation in order to have a balanced view of the whole picture on strategic change within Eskom. Further, the study only evaluated the differences in the perceptions of employees type and not the reasons behind them. Therefore, the study recommends that future studies should be conducted focussing on the reasons behind the perception differences of different employee's types with regard to organisational changes.

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