The role of top management support in the implementation of public sector supply chain management in the public sector in Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study investigated the role of top management support in the implementation of public sector supply chain management practices with specific reference to public procuring entities in Harare, Zimbabwe. In order to achieve the intended research objectives, the study used a quantitative research design where 217 questionnaires were distributed to both employees and management. The study found that top management from the public procuring entities did not provide adequate necessary information and communication technological tools necessary for effective supply chain management planning. It was also revealed that the top management in the public procuring entities does not provide an organizational vision that embraces supply chain management continual improvement. Furtherance, the study concluded that there is no commitment supported by adequate resources on the implementation of supply chain management practices and strategies from the top management in the public sector procuring entities. The study recommends that it should be the role of management to implement realistic objectives and provide supply chain management related training to their employees, enhance teamwork effort and provide priority and attention to internal and external customers. The support of senior management support would greatly influence the successful implementation of supply chain management practices in public procuring entities.

Key Words: Commitment, Public Procuring Entities, Service Delivery, Supply Chain Management Practices, Top Management, Efficiency

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a paper by a PhD student, Denias Kagande, who teamed up with his supervisors and an Oman based Zimbabwean academic to write this paper. It is a University of Zimbabwe PhD degree graduation requirement to have an accepted journal paper. Governments in both developing and developed countries have been progressively adopting various ways of modernizing and improving public supply chain management. Like any other organisation, public institutions have to deal with new supply chain strategies in line with government strategic goals and service delivery charters (Brosze, 2010; Njonde and Kimanzi, 2014; Tseng, 2013). Globally, governments have been investing resources in order to streamline and improve public sector supply chain management practices (Butner, 2010; Njonde and Kimanzi, 2014; Sourani and Sohail, 2011). This has been geared towards the enhancement of tender accessibility, cost saving, efficiency improvement and reduce corruption in supply chain management services.

The Singapore government is renowned for both high efficiency and low corruption, an ill affecting many governments in the world, (Sheffi, 2014). It is important to understand the intricate political dynamics involved in public procurement as a whole in Zimbabwe. It is concerned with service to society, affordability, public infrastructure development, minimising or eliminating corruption, not buying from hostile nations as far as practical and favouring friendly countries, maintaining and increasing industrial production, pleasing the political constituencies, a watch on the next election, pleasing public opinion, fairness of distributing the national cake, economic growth considerations, industrialisation, value for money considerations, transparency, fairness, access to government business by all, buy Zimbabwe considerations, import substitution, sanctions busting because of European and United States of America imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, promoting investment in the country, punishing businesses associated with opposition political outfits (though unwritten), promoting innovation and research, helping vulnerable groups and segments, promoting good health and prosperity, political correctness and uplifting marginalised groups. There could be other reasons normally associated with any conscious political system.

Transparent, reliable efficient institutions and rule of law were important than ever before for risk-taking and innovation, and national wealth, power and economic opportunity provided for citizens was not a distinction that is bestowed to last forever like an honorary degree, but must be earned continually like a basketball player's batting average, (Friedman and Mandelbaum, 2011). This was a stark warning to all countries to avoid complacency. Each country had to check that its institutions had a no-nonsense business and service culture, and that none became an enclave and hideout for lazy uncommitted workers and thieves. Findings by Jraisat & Sawalha (2013:194-207) identified the high-order factors of quality control (QC) and demonstrated the role of QC in SCM, acting as the main strategy to improve supply chains. Management support is expected to come in handy and help maintain quality standards which benefit all interest groups naturally.

In developing countries, such as Zimbabwe, good supply chain management practices are increasingly being recognized by many public institutions. Supply chain management has been a positive catalyst for just-in-time inventory management resulting in effective service delivery in public institutions. This has been at a time when procurement inventory in most of Zimbabwean public institutions has been over 60% of total expenditure (Carter and Easton, 2011). However, the demand for lean inventory in public institutions has been dismally failing to have corresponding long-term supply chain strategy due to inadequate top management commitment. Indeed, it has been noted that the commitment of top management in the implementation of supply chain management practices issues has remained peripheral (Achanga, Shehab, Roy and Nelder, 2005; Basheka, 2008; Wogube, 2011). Consequently, this has negatively hindered the smooth implementation of supply chain strategy which has been widely praised for reducing overstocking in line with the public institutions service delivery charters.

More so, most top-level managers in the Zimbabwean public institutions are less concerned about supply chain management issues and are reluctant to allocate adequate financial, technological and human resources to implement supply chain management practices, but the limitations and frustrations that they face must be understood as a country under sanctions. As noted

by Sandberg and Abrahamsson (2010), top management has always been hesitant to fully implement supply chain management practices since this involves robust amounts of documentation work. As a result, lack of top management commitment in the implementation of supply chain management practices has been a stumbling block for the implementation of overall strategy in most public procuring institutions. The other pertinent challenges were related to partly lack of top management support in the successful implementation of supply chain management practices in public procuring institutions which include organisation behavioural issues such as dismal employee commitment, poor communication skills and lack of appropriate supply chain performance evaluation goals. More worrisome, Malela (2010) notes that only 14% of top management in the public institutions have been actively involved in driving, developing and executing supply chain strategies. In light of the above discussion and comprehensive literature review, the study was initiated to achieve the following research objectives:

  i.   Establish the role of top management support on implementation of supply chain strategy in public institutions in Zimbabwe.
  ii.   Determine the effect of top management involvement on implementation of supply chain management.
  iii. Establish whether top management empowers employees to solve supply chain management related problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The profound significance of top management commitment in supply chain as well as successful procurement planning implementation is widely recognized by various scholars and practitioners (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe and Avci, 2008; Erik and Mats, 2010; Fawcett, Ellram and Ogden, 2009; McKinnon, 2010). For instance, Fawcett, Ellram and Ogden (2009) argue that the commitment of management would represent a shift towards enhancing efficient and effective supply management practices in public sector organisations. In the same vein, Abrahamsson

(2010) opines that the support of top management is the most important ingredient for the successful implementation of supply chain management practices and procurement planning in both public and private organisations. Thus, it can be argued that the success of any supply management system in an organisation is based on senior managers offering not only strong leadership and active support but also demonstrating unfettered commitment. This research seeks to test the hypotheses:

  1. Top management involvement in the implementation of supply chain management helps improve operations.
  2. If top management empowers employees to solve supply chain management related problems systems work much better.

The field research findings in this research would either accept or reject these hypotheses. Top management plays a leading role through the provision of necessary resources, establishing a quality supply chain management structure as well as management of the whole process through close monitoring and evaluation. This should be complimented by an organisational culture and climate that is open for cooperation and teamwork in supply chain management (Achanga, Shehab, Roy and Nelder, 2005; Basheka, 2009; Wogube, 2011). In other words, leadership with a deep comprehension of how to lead change process must lead supply chain management processes since this should be a long-term organizational strategy. In the same context, Aketch and Karanja (2013) believe that senior management should always put in their mind a supply chain management agenda. According to Ben Brik, Mellahi and Rettab (2013), the various factors that relate to top management commitment include supplier development actions such as direct investments in supplier organisations, continuous site visits and supplier recognition. Usually, when there is no top management commitment then the resources may proscribe capability and discourage cooperation intentions. In other words, without the senior management commitment, the vision required for the success of supply chain cannot be achieved.

Furthermore, the implementation of supply chain management practices in an organisation would require commitment from all levels of staff

including management. This is expounded by Emmett and Sood (2010) who argue that management should also empower and make individual employees accountable for their work. It is also equally important for senior management to understand how supply chain management continuous improvement programmes fits in with strategic goals. According to Prugsamatz (2010), top management is responsible for establishing overall organisational goals and ensuring clear alignment. These goals should be embedded in the organization's business plan and become part of the normal day to day business. Moreover, senior management is also responsible for motivating every employee about the need for significant changes. As elucidated by Basheka (2009), it is the role of senior management to motivate employees by clearly communicating the benefits of continuous improvement.

According to Saleemi (2010), top management must institute leadership capable of driving quality supply chain management transformation processes. In this regard, there is the need for both transformational and transactional leadership in the public sector organisations. This is also stated by Katarzyna (2012) who postulates that top management should be at the forefront of the supply chain management process starting from the initial stages. Gorane and Ravi (2013) note that it is unfortunate that some managers in the public procuring entities do not have enough comprehension of the importance of supply chain management. For instance, although top management with finance or accounting background may appreciate the role of supply chain management practices in terms of impact on cost of goods/services, most of them would not be prepared to deal with the technical requirements and importance of a critical supplier partnership. On the other hand, top management with engineering backgrounds would appreciate the significance of new product development assistance but would struggle with supply chain complexities (Effy and Andy, 2008). Moreover, some of the top managers in the public procuring entities have a general distrust of suppliers and thus regard all supply chains as "suspicious". Other top managers in public procuring entities regard supply chain management as an order expediting function that does not require the need for investing in organisational resources (Lera and Alberto, 2013).

Within the same framework of thought, Omware (2012) argues that lack of top management commitment and support can act as a stumbling block to the success of supply chain management. Consequently, without the senior management commitment, the vision required for the success of supply chain cannot be achieved.

Moreover, it is the job of top management to endorse supply chain management initiatives and provide the necessary resources. As expounded by Adagala (2014), it is only the top level of management that could dedicate resources and realign the incentives for the development of cross functional capabilities. It is also the role of top level management to see that managers at lower levels and employees implement all supply chain management initiatives and programs (Adagala, 2014; Effy and Andy, 2008; Gupta, 2012; Omware 2012). Furtherance, effective planning in supply chain management should be based on trust and shared information among supply chain partners and this should be a fundamental requirement. This is also argued by Mathiyazhagan, Govindan, NoorulHaq and Geng (2013) who opine that top management trust is of profound significance in creating successful supply chain relationships since these heavily depend on interdependency among partners. When there is both trust and commitment among the supply chain partners, there would be positive productivity, efficiency and effectiveness (Aketch and Karanja, 2013; Patricia, 2015). Accordingly, it is virtually impossible to bring other functional departments such as marketing and manufacturing without the commitment and support of top management.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTATION

The study adopted a quantitative research design and this ensured that there was complete description of the situation and minimized researcher bias in the collection, interpretation and analysis of data.

The target of the study consisted of employees and management from public procuring entities in Harare. There are approximately 500 employees and management for the selected 10 of the public institutions in Harare (Zimstats, 2014).

The following simplified formula by Yamane (1967) was used to calculate the study's sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where, n = the expected sample size, N = the population, e = ±0.05, is the level of precision

Thus, a total of 217 respondents were selected to participate in the study. The exact respondents for the study sample were determined using stratified random sampling technique and this was meant to ensure that different groups of the population were adequately represented. Stratified sampling was used to select the respondents in terms of two homogeneous groups (management and employees).

A survey questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. In line with Achanga, Shehab, Roy and Nelder (2005), a pilot study was used for the purpose of verifying research instrument validity. The pilot test was conducted using 12 questionnaires that were administered to the employees in the respective public procuring entities. Most of the variables in the questionnaires were derived from supply chain management Fawcett, Ellram and Ogden, (2009); Katarzyna, (2012) and logistics McKinnon, (2010) empirical studies. The completed questionnaires were then checked for both consistency and comprehensiveness (Marczyk DeMatteo and Festinger, 2009). All the questionnaires were self-administered by the researcher using the drop and pick method. After the respondents had filled their views, these were returned within the stipulated deadline that was set.

The completed questionnaires were first checked for completeness and these were then coded and put into particular categories that fitted the research objectives. The data was cleaned, coded, categorized for each of the research variables and then analyzed.

FINDINGS

From the targeted sample size, a total of 202 respondents filled the questionnaires making a response rate of 93.08%.as depicted in Table 1 below. The high response rate was a result of exceptional interest in the topic and the absence of political sensitivities.

Table 1. Response Rate

Respondents	Distributed Questionnaires	Returned Questionnaires	Response Rate
Management	35	31	88.57%
Employees	182	171	93.96%
Total	217	202	93.08%

The first aspect that was investigated pertained to the general biographical data of the respondents. These included position of respondents, sex, educational qualifications and working experience. Regarding the biographical information, 53% of the respondents were males whilst the remaining 47% were females. In terms of educational qualifications, the majority of the respondents (57%) had diplomas and this was followed by undergraduate degrees (24%). Additionally, 12% had secondary education only whilst 7% were holders of masters' degrees. It can be argued that the study's respondents were highly educated to comprehend the topic under discussion pertaining to the role of top management support in the implementation of public sector supply chain management practices. The study also asked about the working experiences of the respondents in their respective public procuring entities. According to the findings, 19% had been with the organisations for less than a year and 25% fell within the 1 year to 5 years category. In addition, 39% had been with organisations for between 6 years and 10 years whilst 17% had been with the organizations for more than 10 years. Thus, it can be argued that the research findings were obtained from respondents most of whom had experienced and noticed supply chain management practices introduced by the public procuring entities over a long period of time.

The table below summarizes the demographic details obtained from the study.

Table 2 Demographic Details of Respondents

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency
Gender of respondents	Males	53%
	Females	47%
Level of education	Secondary education	12%
	Diplomas	57%
	Undergraduate degrees	24%
	Masters' degrees	7%
Working experience	Less than 1 year	19%
	1 year to 5 years	25%
	6 years to 10 years	39%
	Above 10 years	17%

The study first sought to determine whether management provided the necessary information and communication technology tools necessary for effective supply chain management planning. According to the findings, 39% strongly disagreed, 34% disagreed and 20% were undecided. However, 6% agreed with the statement that management provided the necessary information and communication technology tools necessary for effective supply chain management planning and only 1% strongly agreed. The diagram below illustrates the findings:
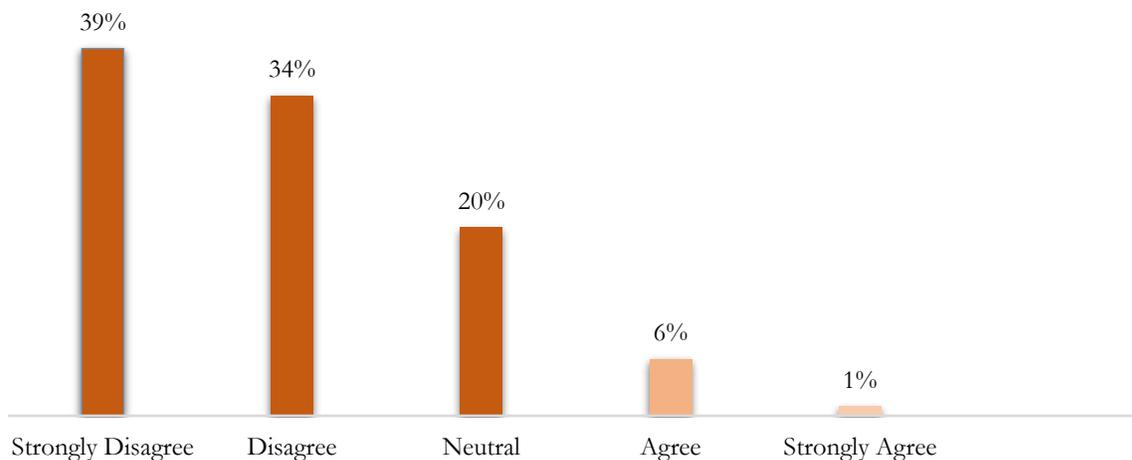

Figure 1. Provision of necessary information and communication technology tools by management necessary for effective supply chain management planning

The above findings illustrate that the majority of the study respondents (73%) believe that top management from the public procuring entities did not provide the necessary information and

communication technology tools necessary for effective supply chain management planning. The study also asked about whether senior management in the public procuring entities gave utmost attention and priority to the needs of their internal and external customers. According to the findings,

38% strongly disagreed, 29% disagreed and 14% remained neutral. In addition, 11% agreed whist 8% disagreed. These findings are illustrated below:
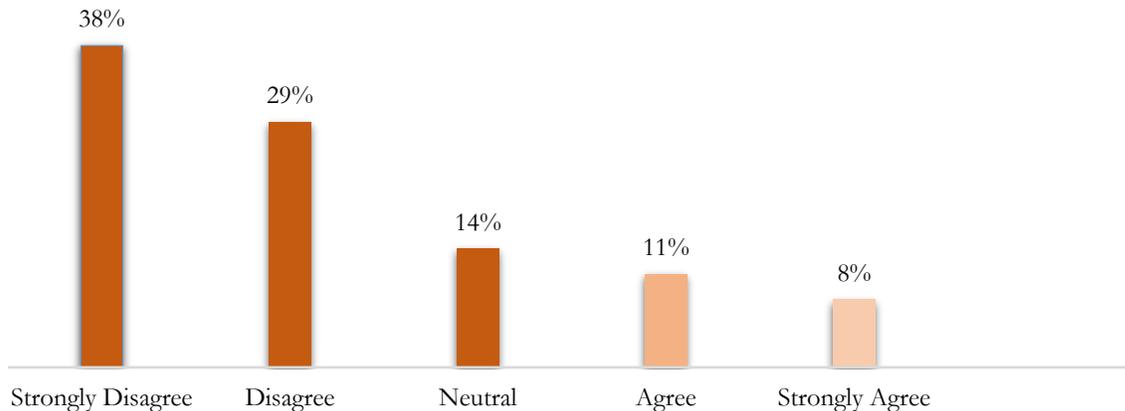
Figure 2. Senior management in the public procuring entities gives utmost attention and priority to the needs of their internal and external customers

The study also sought to determine whether senior management was active in establishing supply chain management vision for continual improvement of public procuring entities. According to the primary

data findings, 28% strongly disagreed, 30% disagreed and 33% were undecided. In addition, the study revealed that 7% strongly agreed with the statement whilst only 2% agreed. These findings are shown below:
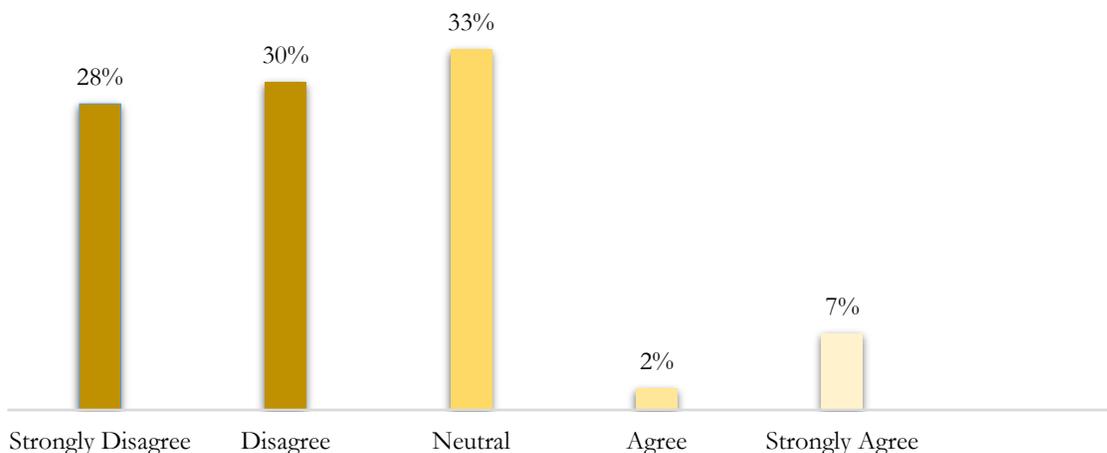
Figure 3. Senior management active in establishing supply chain management vision for continual improvement of public procuring entities

From the above findings, it can be deduced that the top management in the public procuring entities do not provide an organizational vision that would

embraces supply chain management continual improvement. An analysis was done on whether management considered capacity building training

as part of the organization supply chain strategy. From the findings, 23% strongly disagreed, 42% disagreed, 17% were neutral and 11% agreed. Only

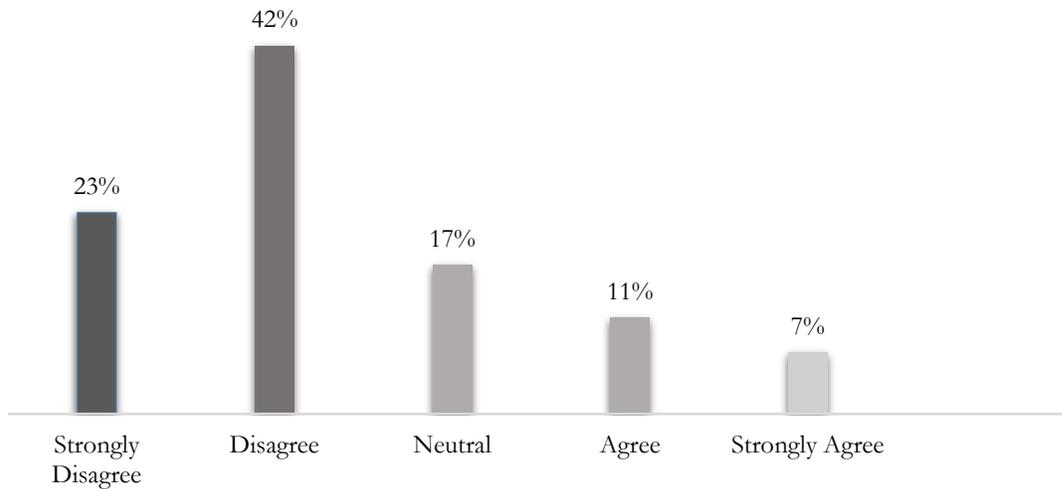7% strongly agreed and the results are diagrammatically illustrated below:

Figure 4. Management considers capacity building training as part of the organization supply chain strategy

From the above findings, it can be deduced that the public procuring entities under study did not regard training as part of organization wide supply chain strategy. This shows that training is not regarded by management as an important tool for the success of public procuring entities in the implementation of various strategies and supply chain management practices.

The respondents were asked to rate the support of the top management in the implementation of supply chain management practices in the public procuring entities. According to the findings, 62% of the respondents confirmed that their support was poor whilst 21% said it was fair. Additionally, 13% of the respondents believed that the support of management was good and only 4% described management support as excellent. These findings are illustrated below:
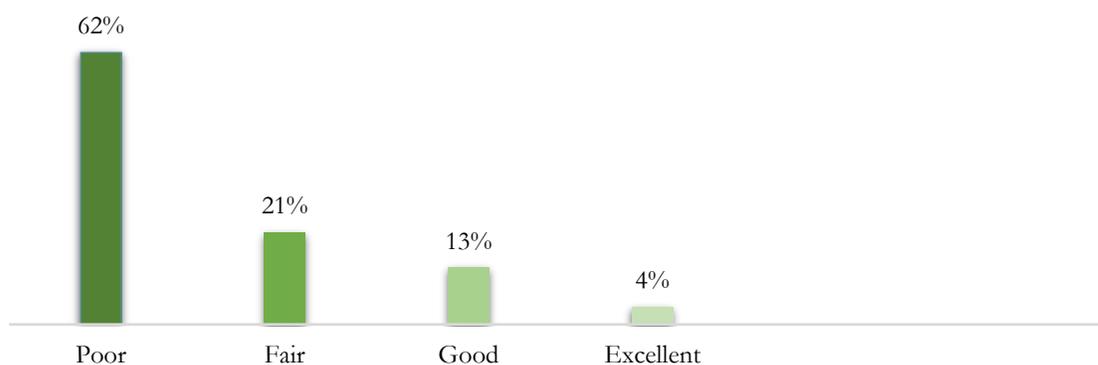

Figure 5. Support of the top management in the implementation of supply chain management practices in the public procuring entities

From the above findings, it can be inferred that there is no good will on the implementation of supply chain management practices and strategies

from the top management in the public sector procuring entities. This invariably implies that the employees in the public procuring entities,

particularly in the purchasing departments, do not work as a team in the implementation of supply chain management practices. One would want tom know the reasons for this, quite important.

The study also sought to establish the frequency of management supervision in the use of supply chain strategies in the public procuring entities.

According to the findings, the majority of the respondents (68%) believed that top management never supervises the use of supply chain strategies in the public procuring entities. In addition, 26% stated annually, 5% semiannually and only 1% quarterly. The results are graphically illustrated below.
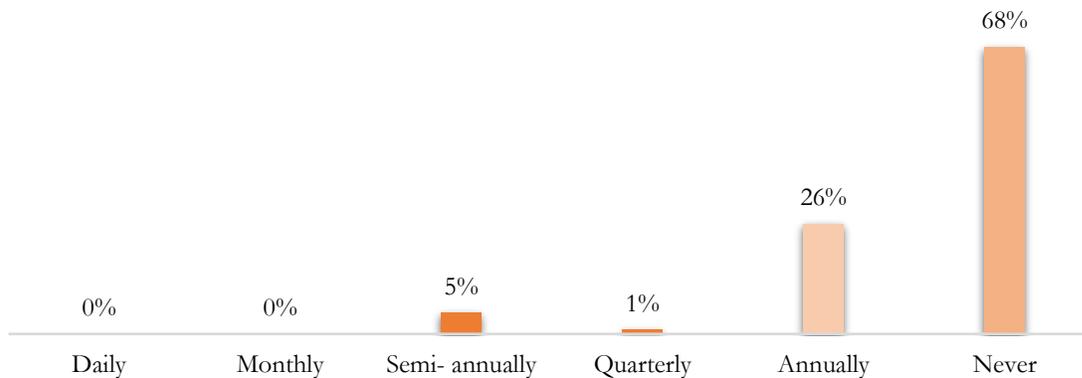

Figure 6. Frequency of management supervision in the use of supply chain strategies in the public procuring entities

The above findings do indicate that, to a large extent, top management in the public procuring entities does not supervise the use of supply chain strategies. This shows that management is not much concerned with the progress of the implementation of supply chain management practices in these public procuring entities.

Regarding top management offering new staff members opportunities to learn supply chain management programs, 38% strongly disagreed, 44% disagreed, 9% were neutral, 6% agreed and 3% strongly agreed. These findings are illustrated below:
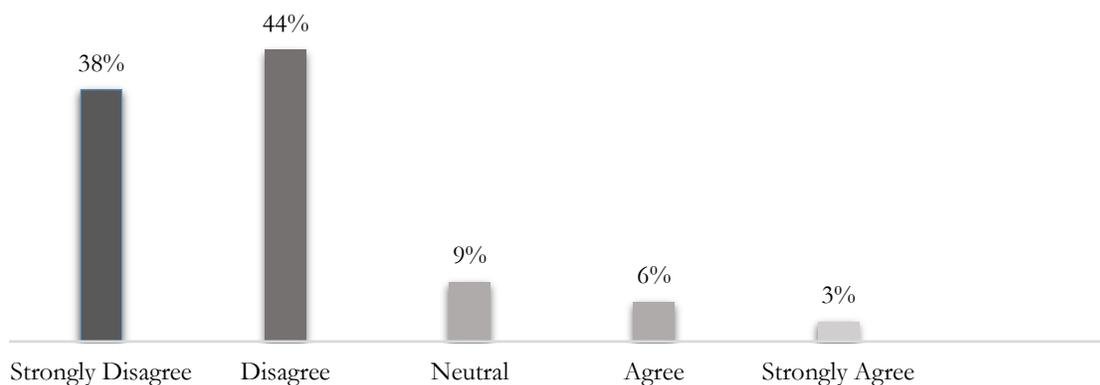

Figure 7. Top management offering new staff members opportunities to learn supply chain management programs

The above findings do show that most of the responses were slanted towards disagreement

(82%). This indicates that the majority of the respondents did not agree that new staff members

were provided with opportunities by senior management to learn supply chain management programs. This shows that the support from the top management regarding new staff members learning supply chain management programs is very poor among the public procuring entities under study.

In order to determine the association between the individual indicators of top management commitment and implementation of supply chain management practices correlation analysis was used for the study. Multiple-regression was then used to determine the general effect of senior management commitment on the implementation of supply chain management practices in the public sector institutions in Harare. The findings are tabulated below:

Table 3. Correlation Analysis. Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed).

		Leadership	Top management involvement	Critical resources	SCM practices
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0			
Top management involvement	Pearson Correlation	0.257	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		
Critical resources	Pearson Correlation	0.104	0.291	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	
SCM practices	Pearson Correlation	0.665	0.609	0.311	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0.063	0

The correlation table showed that SCM practices have positive and significant correlations with two independent variables (leadership r= 0.665; $p < 0.05$ and Top management involvement r = 0.609; $p < 0.05$). However critical resources exhibited an insignificant association with SCM practices (0.311; $p > 0.05$).

The study proceeded to conduct regression analysis to establish the impact of independent variables (leadership, top management involvement and critical resources) on SCM practices. Table 4 illustrates the explanatory power of each independent variable

Table 4. Regression Analysis

Senior Management Commitment	Standard Coefficients	p-value	T- Values
Leadership	0.634	0	3.814
Top management involvement	0.685	0	4.731
Critical resources	0.662	0	3.142
R	0.497		
R ^{2}	0.442		
Adjusted R^2	0.428		
F	24.473		
N	202		

As shown from the above table, there is a positive relationship between senior management commitment and the implementation of supply chain management practices with a multiple correlation of (R) of 0.497. The adjusted R^2 of 0.428 shows that 42.8% of the variations in the public institutions can be explained by senior management commitment variables such as leadership, top management involvement and critical resources which were used in the study. This implies that other factors not studied in this research contribute 57.2% of the SCM practices. In particular, the regression analysis revealed that leadership (β= 0.634, p = 0.000, top management involvement (β = 0.685; p = 0.000 and critical resources (β= 0.662; p= 0.000 are statistically significant predictors of SCM practices, were positively correlated with customer satisfaction with coefficients of 0.634, 0.685 and 0.662 respectively. At 5% level of significance, the F-statistic of 24.473 indicated that the model is useful in determining a predictive relationship between senior management commitment and implementation of supply chain management practices. The discussions that follow mirror these field research findings.

Discussion of Findings

The primary data findings revealed that top management in the public institutions under study were not proactive in the formulation and implementation of procurement goals with enterprise resource planning as well as supplier coordination. However, these results disagree with Bechini, Cimino, Marcelloni and Tomasi (2008) who argue that top management should be proactive in the formulation and implementation of procurement goals with enterprise resource planning as well as supplier coordination. The findings also do not concur with Faisal (2010) who argues that information and communication technology tools should be introduced by top management as a source of competitive power.

The study also established that most senior management staff in the public institutions did not have the vision that should be used as a tool in communicating overall supply chain objectives for continual improvement The findings are in disagreement with Vickland and Nieuwenhuijs (2009) who argue that senior management should have the vision that should be used as a tool in communicating overall supply chain objectives for continual improvement. This would result in the

motivation of procurement workforce and alignment of supply chain continual improvement with overall organisational objectives of the organization. In the same context, Achanga, Shehab, Roy and Nelder (2005) argue that it is also equally important to involve a cross section of employees in the process of developing the vision since this would increase both commitment and ownership in the organisation. Further to that, the findings are in sharp contrast with studies by Haag and Cummings (2010) and Njonde and Kimanzi (2014) who concluded that top management play a significant role in the training of new employees especially for the implementation of supply chain management concepts in public institutions. Thus, most new employees in the public procuring entities have inadequate training and empowerment that would result in their inability to identify and resolve any supply chain related challenges and problems thereby hindering organizational effectiveness and efficiency. European law was designed to manage public procurement awarding procedures strictly in order to ensure equality among tenderers as well as high quality in goods and services and, that public contractual activity was subject to a mixture of administrative and private law, (Chirulli, 2011).

Zimbabwean public procurement law was designed along the same lines to plug leakages and shut out corrupt tendencies. What tended to disrupt systems in Zimbabwe was an exodus of employees to regional and overseas countries as they fled the economic meltdown triggered by European and American sanctions. It meant that those trained left and institutional memory embedded in them went with them, including technical know-how on vision, mission and rules and regulations. So, companies continued to be training grounds which have very little employee retention capacity as labour turnover factors were beyond their control but in the political and governmental sphere. Readers need to be educated on this as the wider economy is brought into the equation. Job satisfaction is a crucial factor that determines retention of employees in all industries, Dhanapal, Alwie, Subramaniam & Vashu (2013:128-139). This blunt warning needed no further qualification and was the dilemma facing public entities in Zimbabwe, retention of highly skilled workers long term as well as confidence building with this class of employees.

Vluggen, Kuijpers, Semeijn and Gelderman (2020) had a stuck warning regarding Social Return On Investment in public procurement when they said that Trust among parties involved and their representatives was a major driver for SROI development and was not measured well enough, which complicated analysing and reporting its development. An empirical paper done by Wang, Y., Sun, H., Jia, T. and Chen, J. (2021) concluded that buyer-supplier interaction facilitated ambidextrous innovation, namely exploitative innovation and exploratory innovation which in turn enhanced business performance, and finally that competitive intensity strengthened companies while dysfunctional competition weakened them. Zimbabwe was a mixed bag with numerous supply constraints that it faced due to Western sanctions, policy inconsistence and endemic corruption (many top bureaucrats, politicians and government ministers had been jailed). Research by Hassan and Oukil (2021) had the result that attractive systems and their commercial models to be acquired should be low cost, required small space, and had high capacity. This was necessary for management to consider as part of deliberate economic moves to assist operatives in both the public and private sectors do their operations jobs in supply chain with ease.

It would be unfair to take a simplistic approach to these issues as top management in the public procurement entities operate in a wider economy where principles of economics and business applied. Procurement was a business function which had the same overall objectives of achieving company mission, vision and objectives and best serving investors foremost and other stakeholders. Supply chain activities cover everything from product development, sourcing, production, and logistics, as well as the information systems needed to coordinate these activities, (Handfield, 2013). From this explanation it becomes clear that SCM was central to firm efficiency, survival and competitiveness as well as governmental service excellence. Handfield said the concept of supply chain management was based on two core ideas. The first was that practically every product that reached an end user represented the cumulative effort of multiple organizations. These organizations were referred to collectively as the supply chain. The second idea was that while supply chains have existed for a long time, most

organizations had only paid attention to what was happening within their "four walls." Few businesses understood, much less managed, the entire chain of activities that ultimately delivered products to the final customer. The result was disjointed and often ineffective supply chains. The future of world trade, and the global trading system, will be shaped by a range of economic, political and social factors, including technological innovation, shifts in production and consumption patterns, and demographic change, WTO (2013). The well-informed WTO view was that the future of trade will also be affected by the extent to which politics and policies successfully address issues of growing social concern, such as the availability of jobs and persistent income inequality, as well as environmental concerns. In supply chain management there were many considerations about quality, stock availability, lead times, KPIs, organisational focus, branding, productivity, efficiency, reliability, past history of performance, vagaries of weather to be considered, public holidays in different countries, country of origin effect (positive or negative – Zimbabwe obviously had a very negative country of origin effect because of the toxic politics it has been experiencing since the year 2000 when the land reform exercise was initiated to take back farms/land which had been forcibly taken from black people by colonialists), time zone differences, wars and conflicts in some countries and transit routes, trade agreements, sweat shops, child labour in supply chain, smuggling, duty evasion, customs inspections, hacking, cyber security, duties and tariffs, quotas, licences and permits, language barriers, strikes and conflicts, seasonal issues, culture, religion, time period length away from high pitched national elections, strategic alliances and the need to buy in the group or subsidiary companies, the national mood and localisation issues, corruption and personal interests by some managers, collusion, shortages on the market, cashflow situation, demand fluctuations for your own products, cyclical troughs for the national economy (boom, recession, depression, inflation), availability of foreign currency to import, annual shutdowns of companies and their effect, relocations, support industries, technological developments in the market, new competitors, national crisis and opportunities, pandemics like Covid19, effects of graduate trainees on productivity, staff succession planning, big data issues and artificial intelligence,

societal expectations, green issues and environmental legislation, cybersecurity, fraud, risk management, insurance factors, natural hazards, pollution, trust, confidence, location of suppliers, weekends, religious festivals (key religious holidays, rites and customs) and government orientation. This is not a simplistic job for the faint hearted but now required university degrees, and advanced degrees right up to PhD degrees. The business landscape was now too slippery, risky and dangerous. In dealing with globalization, a logistician needs to be able to integrate, communicate, and analyze from an international perspective, perform financial analysis, maintain good industry and customer relations, exhibit strong people skills, stay healthy, and understand laws and regulations, (Wu, et al, 2013). The authors said industry believed that cross-functional marketing skills were critical and emphasized the importance of risk and financial management. That was the missing dimension for most SCM practitioners, inadequate knowledge and sophistication in marketing management, which was the very purpose of business, serving the customer.

Companies and government ministries that continued to be run by staffers with high school certificate only were a big risk unto themselves and their stakeholders. Modern supply chain departments needed as a minimum someone with a diploma in supply chain and up to degree level for lower level, middle and top-level employees. Anything less than this was an accident in waiting. Sometimes competence in key international foreign languages was necessary too depending on the markets served. As regards hypotheses it is clear from the findings that:

a. Top management involvement in the implementation of supply chain management helps improve operations. This hypothesis is accepted.
b. If top management empowers employees to solve supply chain management related problems systems work better. This hypothesis is accepted as well.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study concludes that the level of support offered by top management in implementation of supply chain management in public procuring entities is very weak. However, it should be the role of management to implement realistic objectives and provide supply chain management related training to their employees, enhance teamwork effort and provide priority and attention to internal and external customers. The support of senior management support would greatly influence the successful implementation of supply chain management practices in public procuring entities. The public procuring entities should consider training employees before introduction of any supply chain management strategy. Moreover, the training should be tailored to meet organisational strategic objectives. These would make the implementation of supply chain strategies successful thereby improving the organizational productivity and customer service. Top managers would also require training sessions on the implementation of supply chain management practices, and these should be done in well calculated stages aimed at providing enough knowledge and skills to all employees. The study finally recommends that there is a need to ensure that the requisite supply chain technological infrastructure is in place especially in outlying areas out of Harare where information technology connectivity is a major challenge. The study proved that top management in public procuring entities should offer support to the procurement staff by offering the necessary resources. This is because all supply chain improvement initiatives would usually fail dismally in the absence of top management commitment.

Throughout this paper it was quite obvious that managers needed to wear two hats, one as professional practisioners, and the other as conscious political players who have no choice but to address political imperatives dictated by the government of the day. It would be unfair to say managers had no vision, mission and good objectives when they spent long periods or months drafting and refining these strategic documents, most times with the technical input of top-level consultants and academics from leading universities, even from outside Zimbabwe and from the developed world. The devil was always in the implementation or details. It is not a secret that parastatals in Zimbabwe, municipalities/local authorities and government ministries were partly nests for employing relatives and whole clans. How then would managers maintain discipline managing brothers and sisters-in-law and in-laws, African or any other culture being what it is where in-laws were untouchable and there was natural sympathy for family members even when wrong? Management control breaks down. Throughout history the Japanese have been quite vocal about this, raising a red flag. It does not end there but goes further where bosses have their relatives employed or government ministers and top bureaucrats had their family members employed including their harem of mistresses. Some managers and officers who have attempted to rigidly enforce and apply the public procurement code of conduct and procedures have cursed themselves after getting fired or dismissed for doing the right thing. Impunity was quite common in most 3rd world countries where the political class and elites were partly untouchable. It was worse in the public procurement sphere where there were a lot of vested interests by top politicians and bureaucrats across the spectrum and corruption was the order of the day. This was an area which was a corporate minefield and deadly snare for managers and operatives. Berman and Rabin quoting (Søreide, 2002; Kaufman,2004) proffered that studies showed that public procurement was most prone to corruption, (Berman and Rabin, 2009:20).

It was unfortunate most literature blamed managers in public procurement instead of understanding the toxic environment they operated in. In countries like South Africa public tender awarding had led to shootings and deaths. Where was the freedom to do what is right when you have a gun on your head or unwritten threats of dismissal? In Mexico and Italy one has the mafia as players in the economy. Where would fairness come from? Procurement Committees would always preach adherence to rules and regulations, which is correct, but in practice a lot of political dynamics would be at play. Top management support and commitment mattered but it was more than that which was required for a successful efficient public procurement system. A whole chain of other institutions outside your own company had a lot to do with public procurement spanning many countries of the world.

All said it still remains the ideal situation to have good public procurement systems that deliver value to society, but the existing limitations should be taken into account. Good companies offering best value for money may partly be out of reach due to sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the European Union and the United States of America. Managers have no solution in such instances. Those in sanctions free countries may not know this. Nobody should ignore political realities around us as there were consequences for doing that, some quite dire. Covid19 had also resulted in most countries looking more inward and being too protectionist of local businesses. Localisation of jobs has increased in many countries as jobs dwindle and foreigners are given the boot to pave way for locals, which is quite noble for any country naturally. Literature does not have all these issues. This is the gap in knowledge filled by this research as a contribution to knowledge and academia.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

The study has assessed the role of top management support in the implementation of public sector supply chain management practices for public procuring entities in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study was purely a cross-sectional survey that relied on data from selected public procuring entities in Harare. A richer understanding of the role of top management support in the implementation of public sector supply chain management practices might be expected if longitudinal data is utilized. A longitudinal research design might present the evidence of causation which could not be achieved through the use of cross-sectional survey designs. Therefore, future studies might consider this research direction.

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