



STRATEGIC INNOVATION IN KENYAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: A RESEARCH AGENDA LINKING ADMINISTRATION AND SCHOLARSHIP

Collins Ogutu MIRUKA

Department of Business Administration

Faculty of Business Studies

Tharaka University Marimanti, Kenya

change.miruka@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper outlined a research agenda for advancing strategic innovation in Kenyan public universities by harnessing the dual roles of academics who also serve as administrators. Their position enables the conversion of administrative challenges into opportunities for conceptual inquiry, turning universities into living laboratories for management research. Grounded in strategic management, organizational theory, and public administration, the agenda draws on internal institutional data such as financial reports, administrative records, and IT logs to generate insights that blend theory with practice. Employing conceptual modeling and participatory action research, it seeks to create context-sensitive frameworks that enhance managerial effectiveness while contributing to management scholarship. Core thematic areas include digital transformation, human capital and AI integration, financial sustainability, and diversity and inclusion. The paper emphasizes research that bridges scholarly rigor and operational relevance to strengthen institutional resilience, responsiveness, and strategic evolution within Kenya's higher education system.

Keywords: Strategic Innovation, Public Universities, Kenya; Administrative Scholarship, Participatory Action Research, Organizational Resilience.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Miruka, C. O. (2025). Strategic innovation in Kenyan public universities: A research agenda linking administration and scholarship. *International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management*, 7(4), 768-782. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18060596>.

Copyright © IJILPM 2025

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary university operates at the nexus of academic pursuit and complex administrative realities, particularly within the public sector in developing contexts. The unique vantage point of an individual serving as both a Senior Administrator, and an academic, offers an unparalleled opportunity to bridge the often-disparate worlds of theory and practice (Allsopp et al., 2006). This dual role enables a distinctive form of engaged scholarship (Campbell, 2012)

where administrative challenges become rich sources for theoretical inquiry, and academic insights can directly inform institutional strategy.

The imperative for context-sensitive conceptual research in public university administration, especially in Kenya, is paramount. Universities in the country, just like other public sector institutions, face distinct challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, paper-intensive processes, inherent risks, and evolving demands for improved efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness from stakeholders (Loriston, 2018; Makokha & Mutisya, 2016; Omwami, 2018). While global trends in higher education digital transformation highlight a universal shift towards more integrated and efficient systems (Guz, 2022), existing frameworks often lack the contextual nuance required for effective implementation in developing contexts, where infrastructure limitations and resistance to change are significant factors.

This paper provides a robust foundational element for the research agenda proposed here. The present undertaking, particularly its proposed conceptual framework for digital transformation in Kenyan Public Universities, serves as an excellent starting point. The aim is to develop a conceptual framework for understanding and guiding digital transformation in university administration as well as identify the lack of context-sensitive frameworks to guide administrative digitalization in Kenyan public universities as a critical problem. This directly supports the need for conceptual research tailored to the specific context. The proposed framework identifies core dimensions such as Strategic Vision & Leadership, Organizational Readiness, Digital Infrastructure, Policy and Governance Alignment, Staff Capacity and Culture, User Acceptance and Change Management, and Performance Monitoring and Feedback. This framework demonstrates a clear understanding of the complexity involved and offers a structured approach to conceptual inquiry situated in Kenya.

A significant advantage of this dual role, as an academic as well as a manager, is the ability to transform the university administration into a "living laboratory" for management theory. University management positions grant direct, privileged access to the intricate details of administrative processes, the nuances of policy formulation, the flow of financial data, and the dynamics of human resource management (Serkina & Logvinova, 2019). This access extends beyond mere data points; it encompasses the context in which decisions are made, the causal levers of organizational change, and the real-time impact of managerial interventions (Peters, 2013; Shattock, 2013).

This unique position facilitates a practitioner-scholar model (Buick et al., 2016), where the administrator can develop and refine management theories, for instance, on change management, strategic planning, or public sector innovation, not solely through a review of existing literature, but through direct engagement and observation of their own institution's journey. This allows for the development of highly context-specific, yet potentially generalizable, conceptual frameworks that are empirically informed by internal realities, thereby enriching both academic discourse and practical administrative effectiveness.

FOUNDATIONAL THEORETICAL PILLARS FOR CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH

To underpin a robust research agenda, it is crucial to identify and leverage key theoretical pillars from management and public administration. These theories provide the essential lenses through which internal university data can be analyzed to generate novel conceptual understandings.

Strategic Management and Organizational Theory

Strategic management is understood as a comprehensive and continuous process, encompassing the development and implementation of strategies to achieve long-term organizational goals and objectives (Alharbi, 2024; Baumgartner & Rauter, 2017). It emphasizes adaptability and forward-looking planning. For public universities, particularly those operating in Kenya, this involves conceptualizing strategic agility, building institutional resilience, and engaging in long-term planning amidst pervasive resource constraints and evolving societal demands. The role of leadership is consistently highlighted as paramount in driving institutional change and fostering innovation (Agwoje & Okeleke, 2023; Hayat, 2024; Shattock, 2013), a point echoed in the proposed framework which includes "Strategic Vision & Leadership" as a core dimension.

Established strategic management frameworks, such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal), offer valuable conceptual tools for conducting both internal and external analyses. While these frameworks provide a structured approach, their application in public universities, especially in developing countries, necessitates a nuanced conceptual adaptation. For instance, "weaknesses" might inherently include limited digital infrastructure and unreliable internet connectivity, while "opportunities" could involve forging innovative public-private partnerships to overcome resource deficits. Furthermore, the capacity to identify, develop, and effectively deploy crucial skills, which is a core aspect of human capital management (Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) is recognized as essential for overcoming skills mismatches and is an important ingredient for institutional success and adaptation in a competitive environment.

A critical area for conceptual development lies in addressing the inherent tension between universal "best practices" in strategic management and the imperative for context-specific strategic adaptation. While literature often champions generic frameworks like SWOT and PESTEL, their direct applicability can be limited in the challenging environment of Kenyan public universities, which contend with issues such as limited infrastructure, resistance to change, weak data governance, and significant resource constraints (Makokha & Mutisya, 2016; Omwami, 2018). This necessitates a research stream focused on contingency theory within strategic management for public sector higher education. For example, the concept of "competitive advantage," a cornerstone of frameworks like Porter's Five Forces (Mugo, 2020), must be reframed for a public university that primarily fulfills a national developmental mandate rather than operating in a market-driven competitive landscape.

Similarly, "opportunities" identified through a SWOT analysis will differ significantly when they involve securing international grants for infrastructure development compared to market expansion. This conceptual reinterpretation moves beyond simple application to understanding how external conditions modify, constrain, or even render traditional strategic models ineffective. This line of inquiry contributes to a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of strategic management theory, particularly for non-profit, public-sector organizations in developing economies, moving beyond a Global North-centric view. It would conceptualize "strategic resilience" not merely as market responsiveness but as the ability to achieve long-term goals despite systemic resource and institutional challenges.

Building on the need for contextual adaptation, a compelling area for conceptual exploration involves developing a "Dynamic Capabilities" framework specifically for Strategic Management in Kenyan Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Dynamic capabilities theory

focuses on an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments (Bleady et al., 2018; Cavusgil & Deligonul, 2025). Higher education management, encompassing finance, planning, and development, is central to managing resource allocation and adaptation, aligning with the “Organizational Readiness” and “Staff Capacity” dimensions in the existing framework.

Research could conceptualize how Kenyan public universities, despite limited resources, can develop these dynamic capabilities. This would involve identifying the specific processes such as rapid policy adaptation, agile resource reallocation, continuous staff upskilling, and innovative partnerships that enable them to sense opportunities (e.g., new funding streams, technological advancements like AI), seize them (e.g., implement digital solutions, attract talent), and reconfigure their asset base (e.g., repurpose existing infrastructure, develop new human capital) to achieve strategic goals. This approach shifts the strategic lens from static analysis to a more process-oriented, adaptive view of strategy, offering a theoretical lens for understanding how institutions in challenging environments can not only survive but thrive by continuously evolving their strategic responses. Table 1, titled *Strategic Management Theories Applied in Public University Administration*, provides a structured overview demonstrating how abstract strategic management theories can be concretely applied and re-conceptualized within the unique operational environment of a public university. It serves as a quick reference for university managers to identify theoretical lenses pertinent to their administrative challenges. Table 1 demonstrates in a concise fashion, how university administrators can implement conceptual strategic management theories within the specific operational environment of a public university in Kenya. It is designed as a quick reference for university managers to identify theoretical lenses relevant to their administrative challenges.

The table details several key strategic management theories, including SWOT Analysis, Resource-Based View (RBV), Balanced Scorecard, Stakeholder Theory, Blue Ocean Strategy, Porter's Five Forces, and Dynamic Capabilities (Alharbi, 2024; Bao, 2015; Barney & Arikan, 2005; Calori, 2007; Knudsen, 1995; Makadok et al., 2018; Poister, 2010; Pricop, 2012; Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016). For each theory, the table outlines key concepts, their application in a public university context, and a re-conceptualization specifically tailored for the university environment. For instance, while SWOT Analysis assesses institutional capacity and external pressures, its re-conceptualization for universities incorporates socio-political factors, student activism, and public perception into environmental scanning. Similarly, the Resource-Based View, which typically focuses on competitive advantage from tangible and intangible resources, is re-conceptualized to emphasize knowledge-based assets and reputational capital within a university setting. I have included some older sources of strategic management theories and models because they provide foundational context or present classic experiments and theories that remain relevant to the subject matter. These seminal works, despite their age, offer indispensable insights and historical perspectives that newer literature may not fully capture.

Table 1: Strategic Management Theories Applied to University Administration

Strategic Management Theory	Key Concepts	Application in Public University Context	Re-conceptualization for University Environment
SWOT Analysis	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats	Used to assess institutional capacity, academic reputation, funding sources, and external pressures.	Incorporate socio-political factors, student activism, and public perception as part of environmental scanning.
Resource-Based View (RBV)	Tangible and intangible resources, capabilities, competitive advantage	Evaluate faculty expertise, research output, physical infrastructure, and alumni networks as strategic assets.	Focus on knowledge-based assets and reputational capital rather than market dominance.
Balanced Scorecard	Financial, Customer, Internal Processes, Learning and Growth perspectives	Used to align academic and administrative units with institutional vision and monitor performance.	Integrate academic impact metrics and stakeholder satisfaction alongside financial sustainability.
Stakeholder Theory	Balancing interests of all stakeholders	Addresses diverse needs of students, staff, government, donors, and community.	Promote inclusive decision-making and participatory governance mechanisms.
Blue Ocean Strategy	Value innovation, uncontested market space	Develop niche academic programs, community-based innovations, or online education platforms.	Redefine academic offerings to serve underserved or emerging knowledge areas.
Porter's Five Forces	Industry rivalry, buyer power, supplier power, threat of substitutes, threat of new entrants	Analyze competition from private institutions, government policies, and international universities.	Adapt to the public service ethos and national development goals.
Dynamic Capabilities	Sensing, seizing, and transforming opportunities	Enable the university to adapt to policy changes, digital transformation, and shifting societal demands.	Build internal flexibility through continuous learning and process innovation.

1 **Public Administration And Governance**

2
3 Public administration research has often grappled with a theoretical void, marked by a
4 disconnect between conceptual and empirical studies (Elías, 2022). The proposed research
5 agenda presents a significant opportunity to bridge this gap by focusing explicitly on
6 theoretical framing in public administration studies, particularly concerning decision-making
7 processes, interactions among various actors, and the influence of institutional arenas. This
8 approach can deepen the understanding of how Kenyan (public universities, as complex
9 administrative entities, navigate their operational and strategic mandates.

10 Within the realm of public administration, understanding accountability is paramount.
11 Thompson's influential work identifies three distinct models of public sector accountability:
12 hierarchical, professional, and participatory (Thompson, 2017). These models hold
13 significant relevance for university governance, where accountability can be directed
14 upwards to government ministries, outwards to professional academic standards and
15 accreditation bodies, and downwards to students, parents, and the broader public. Each model
16 implies different expectations for responsibility and ethical conduct. The integration of
17 ethical values and principles into decision-making is vital, ensuring that public administrators
18 prioritize collective welfare, maintain transparency, and adhere to the rule of law, thereby
19 reinforcing public trust.

20 These theoretical considerations intersect with broader trends in public administration,
21 such as the dissolution of traditional governmental boundaries, the rise of "GovTech"
22 initiatives (Desmond & Kotecha, n.d.; Kuziemski et al., 2022), and the increasing emphasis
23 on data sharing and interoperability for citizen-centric service delivery. These trends
24 necessitate new conceptualizations of governance in higher education, moving away from
25 siloed operations towards a "whole-of-government" approach (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007)
26 that emphasizes collaboration across jurisdictions and with the private sector.

27 Yet, a considerable challenge arises from the inherent contradictions and complexities
28 in simultaneously implementing hierarchical, professional, and participatory accountability
29 models within a single public university system, especially during periods of rapid digital
30 transformation. For instance, the hierarchical model emphasizes accountability to elected
31 officials and a chain of command (Reenock et al., 2022), while the professional model
32 prioritizes adherence to an independent code of conduct and expert judgment (Schwimmer &
33 Maxwell, 2017), and the participatory model focuses on direct responsiveness to public
34 demands (Callahan, 2007). These models frequently pull administrators in different
35 directions, creating dilemmas in decision-making, for example, balancing government
36 directives with principles of academic freedom or direct student demands. Research can
37 conceptualize how these tensions manifest in university administration and how leaders
38 navigate them, particularly when digital systems introduce new layers of transparency and
39 data-driven decision-making.

40 Given the challenges posed by conflicting accountability models, a significant
41 conceptual contribution would be the development of "adaptive governance" frameworks
42 (Chaffin et al., 2014; Janssen & Van Der Voort, 2016) for public universities. Such
43 frameworks would aim to reconcile these tensions and integrate ethical considerations with
44 ongoing digital transformation initiatives. This involves exploring how universities can
45 develop flexible governance structures and processes that allow for responsiveness to diverse
46 stakeholders like government, faculty, students, and the community, while maintaining
47 institutional integrity, efficiency, and public trust. Internal data on policy implementation,
48 stakeholder feedback, and the observed outcomes of digital initiatives can provide rich
49 material to develop a framework that outlines how leadership can navigate these
50 complexities, fostering trust and legitimacy in a digitally transforming environment. This

51 would contribute to a more robust understanding of public sector governance in complex,
52 multi-stakeholder settings.

53

54 **KEY CONCEPTUAL AND ACCESSIBLE DATA RESEARCH THEMES**

55

56 I consider the following four thematic areas as representative of a fertile ground for
57 conceptual research, leveraging the administrators' unique access to internal university data
58 and management processes. Each theme is designed to contribute to management theory
59 while providing actionable insights for the university: Digital transformation in higher
60 education; Human Capital, Organizational Culture, and AI Integration; Financial
61 Sustainability and Resource Mobilization in Developing Contexts; and finally Diversity,
62 Inclusion, and Non-Traditional Student Management.

63

64 **Digital transformation in higher education**

65

66 Digital transformation in higher education represents a fundamental shift beyond mere
67 digitization or automation, aiming for comprehensive change that supports various strategic
68 goals. The proposed conceptual framework for digital transformation in Kenyan Public
69 Universities, with its core dimensions, provides an excellent foundation. These dimensions
70 include Strategic Vision & Leadership, Organizational Readiness, Digital Infrastructure,
71 Policy & Governance Alignment, Staff Capacity and Culture, User Acceptance & Change
72 Management, and Performance Monitoring and Feedback.

73 Each dimension is critical for understanding the multifaceted nature of this
74 transformation.

75 Despite growing interest, significant conceptual gaps persist in the literature regarding digital
76 transformation in HEIs. Existing work often provides only technological considerations,
77 neglecting a multi-dimensional approach that integrates organizational culture, policy,
78 leadership, and infrastructure. There is also an absence of scientific literature on how
79 different digital technologies influence the detail, time, and effectiveness of strategic
80 planning. Research is needed to identify how various factors influence the process and
81 outcomes of digital transformation, and to address barriers such as digital vision, leadership,
82 organizational structure, resources, and competence.

83 Navigating the “human-centric” versus “technology-centric” paradox in digital
84 transformation is a major conceptual challenge (Luo et al., 2021). While technology provides
85 the tools and capabilities, successful transformation hinges more profoundly on
86 organizational culture, staff capacity, user acceptance, and committed leadership than on the
87 technology itself. The research could explore how universities can conceptually integrate
88 technological advancements with human-centric design principles to foster genuine adoption
89 and cultural shifts, rather than merely automating existing inefficiencies. This involves
90 understanding the intricate interplay between digital tools and human behavior, and how to
91 cultivate a mindset of innovation, agility, and “antifragility” (Sagala & Ori, 2024) among
92 employees to fully leverage technological advancements. This conceptualization would move
93 beyond a simplistic view of technology adoption to a deeper understanding of socio-technical
94 systems within higher education.

95 Premised on this understanding, a valuable contribution would be the development of
96 a "Digital Maturity Model for African Public Universities." This conceptual model would
97 integrate the core dimensions of the proposed framework with the identified barriers to
98 transformation. It would provide a phased, adaptive implementation approach, outlining
99 stages of digital readiness and transformation, from basic digitization to advanced, integrated
100 digital ecosystems. The model could help institutions self-assess their current state, identify

101 critical areas for intervention, and chart a strategic path for digital evolution, considering their
 102 unique resource and cultural contexts. This would offer a valuable diagnostic and prescriptive
 103 tool for university leaders, enabling them to strategically manage their digital journey.

104 Table 2 provides a concrete link between the abstract dimensions of the digital
 105 transformation framework and the specific types of internal data readily available to
 106 university managers. It demonstrates the feasibility of conceptual research within the user's
 107 operational context, making the research agenda tangible and actionable.

108

109 Table 2: Digital Transformation Dimensions and Accessible Internal Data

110

Framework Dimension	Conceptual Focus	Accessible Internal Data Sources
Strategic Vision & Leadership	Clarity of digital vision, leadership commitment, governance structures for DT.	Strategic plans, policy documents, meeting minutes, leadership communications, internal surveys on leadership perception.
Organizational Readiness	Preparedness for change, existing processes, internal capabilities.	Internal audit reports, process maps, organizational charts, change management plans, staff readiness assessments.
Digital Infrastructure	Availability and reliability of technology, network, hardware, software.	IT infrastructure reports, budget allocations for IT, system uptime logs, user support tickets, network performance data.
Policy & Governance Alignment	Formal policies supporting DT, data governance, regulatory compliance.	University policies (e.g., data privacy, IT use), governance frameworks, compliance reports, internal legal reviews.
Staff Capacity and Culture	Skills, knowledge, willingness to adapt, training programs, resistance to change.	HR training records, staff performance reviews, internal surveys on digital literacy/attitudes, absenteeism rates, feedback from workshops.
User Acceptance & Change Management	Adoption rates, user satisfaction, communication strategies, resistance mitigation.	User feedback forms, system login data, helpdesk inquiries, communication plans, post-implementation reviews.
Performance Monitoring and Feedback	Metrics for success, feedback loops, continuous improvement mechanisms.	Performance reports (e.g., administrative efficiency metrics), feedback mechanisms (e.g., suggestion boxes, online forums), strategic review documents.

111

112 Human Capital, Organizational Culture, and AI Integration

113

114 The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is profoundly impacting organizations,
 115 necessitating a strategic shift from mere AI adoption to its thoughtful adaptation
 116 (Thilagavathy & Venkatasamy, 2023). This transformation is reshaping the landscape of
 117 human resources, highlighting a growing "skills mismatch" and underscoring the critical need
 118 for continuous learning and development within the workforce to maintain relevance and
 119 productivity.

120 AI holds significant conceptual implications for higher education administration. It
 121 can enhance learning experiences through personalized recommendation algorithms and
 122 adaptive learning platforms, facilitate administrative processes, and offer novel research
 123 methodologies for graduate students. In the broader public sector, AI's potential extends to
 124 improving internal operations and public service delivery, offering significant time savings on
 125 routine tasks, optimizing operational efficiency, and transforming complex, fragmented

126 administrative processes. Examples include AI-powered chatbots for citizen queries and
127 intelligent systems for fraud detection (Alhosani & Alhashmi, 2024).

128 However, the integration of AI also necessitates critical conceptual considerations,
129 particularly regarding governance. Establishing robust governance systems is crucial to
130 ensure responsible AI use, define accessibility, set boundaries, and monitor AI-driven
131 decisions. Concerns around data privacy, security, and potential biases in AI outputs are
132 paramount, emphasizing the need for trustworthy and well-managed information as the
133 foundation for effective AI implementation. This new frontier demands that HR, and by
134 extension, university administration, become experts in developing “AI playbooks” and
135 communicating transparently about AI’s impact on roles to build trust.

136 A fundamental conceptual challenge lies in the tension between AI’s promise of
137 significant efficiency gains in administrative processes and the imperative for maintaining
138 human agency, ethical oversight, and a “human touch” in university operations. While AI can
139 automate routine tasks and provide data-driven insights, the ultimate success of a university
140 relies on human judgment, empathy, and complex decision-making, particularly in sensitive
141 areas like student admissions, staff management, or strategic financial planning (Pohling et
142 al., 2016). The research could conceptualize optimal human-AI collaboration models within a
143 university setting, addressing questions of trust, accountability, and the evolving roles of
144 human administrators. This involves exploring how AI can augment human capabilities,
145 allowing staff to focus on strategic, high-value work, thereby improving productivity and job
146 satisfaction.

147 Based on these considerations, a valuable conceptual contribution would be the
148 development of a “Responsible AI Governance Framework for University Administration.”
149 This framework would integrate ethical principles such as fairness, transparency,
150 accountability, and privacy with practical implementation strategies for AI tools within the
151 university context. It would draw on internal policy documents, observed outcomes of AI
152 pilot projects in administrative functions (e.g., automated student query systems, AI-
153 supported financial forecasting), and staff feedback on AI integration. This framework would
154 provide a conceptual blueprint for universities to harness AI’s transformative potential while
155 proactively mitigating its risks, ensuring that AI development and deployment align with the
156 institution’s values, public service mission, and commitment to ethical conduct.

157

158 **Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilization in Developing Contexts**

159

160 Financial sustainability remains a perennial and critical challenge for public universities,
161 particularly in developing countries, where resource constraints are often severe and
162 unpredictable. Strategic planning is therefore essential to align limited resources with long-
163 term institutional goals and objectives. This involves not just budgeting, but a comprehensive
164 approach to resource allocation that supports the university’s mission and vision (Liu, 2024).
165 Financial sustainability is inextricably linked to effective human capital management. Human
166 capital, encompassing the skills, knowledge, and experience of individuals, is recognized as a
167 vital asset and an essential ingredient for institutional success and adaptation in a competitive
168 environment. Strategic human capital management can provide significant benefits,
169 facilitating the efficient execution of organizational policies crucial for the institution’s
170 mission and long-term sustainability.

171 A key conceptual area for exploration is the “ethical paradox of sustainability”, which
172 highlights the inherent tension between “development”, which often requires intervention and
173 resource utilization and “sustainability” focused on preserving natural and institutional capital
174 for future generations (Jabareen, 2012). Applied to university finance, this paradox manifests
175 as the challenge of balancing immediate operational needs and short-term financial pressures

176 (e.g., covering salaries, maintaining facilities) with long-term institutional viability and
177 broader societal developmental goals (e.g., investing in new infrastructure, building research
178 capacity, expanding community engagement). This tension frequently forces difficult trade-
179 offs in resource allocation, demanding conceptual models that can reconcile these competing
180 demands. The research could conceptualize models that optimize resource utilization in
181 resource-constrained environments, moving beyond traditional budgeting to more agile and
182 strategic financial planning that considers both immediate necessities and future aspirations.

183 Building on these conceptual challenges, a valuable contribution would be the
184 development of a "Multi-Stakeholder Resource Mobilization Model" for Kenyan HEIs. This
185 conceptual model would map strategies for optimizing internal resources (e.g., efficient use
186 of existing human capital, repurposing current infrastructure, developing internal revenue
187 generation streams) with external partnership development. It would explore the conceptual
188 underpinnings of successful public-private partnerships (PPPs) and GovTech initiatives in
189 the context of higher education, identifying how universities can strategically engage with
190 non-traditional players (e.g., startups, SMEs, international organizations) to co-create
191 solutions, share risks, and scale innovations. The model would also explicitly address the
192 ethical dimensions of resource allocation and external funding, ensuring that financial
193 strategies align with the university's public mission and long-term sustainability objectives.
194 This would provide a comprehensive framework for diversifying revenue streams and
195 enhancing financial resilience.

196

197 **Diversity, Inclusion, and Non-Traditional Student Management**

198

199 Higher education is undergoing rapid transformation driven by demographic shifts and
200 evolving workforce demands, making diversity and inclusion increasingly critical. This
201 includes the growing number of non-traditional students, such as, adult learners, part-time
202 students, and those with prior learning experiences who challenge traditional pedagogical
203 models and necessitate tailored support services and program structures (Gulley, 2021).
204 Conceptual research opportunities abound in understanding the nuances of implementing
205 diversity and inclusion initiatives. This includes investigating the specific impact and
206 effectiveness of various programs (e.g., targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, student
207 organizations) on reducing disparities and fostering a sense of belonging.

208 Further conceptual exploration can focus on the effectiveness of different approaches
209 to incorporating diverse perspectives into syllabi and the impact of faculty training programs
210 on inclusive teaching practices. Additionally, research could explore strategies for identifying
211 and mitigating implicit biases and systemic barriers within institutions, as well as the
212 dynamics of resistance to change in diversity efforts.

213 For non-traditional students, conceptual opportunities include comparing the
214 effectiveness of flexible learning models (e.g., online, hybrid, evening courses) in terms of
215 student learning outcomes and retention. Research can also focus on identifying the most
216 impactful tailored support services (e.g., academic advising, career counseling, financial aid
217 guidance, childcare) for specific sub-groups of non-traditional students, and evaluating the
218 return on investment for institutions providing these specialized services. Furthermore,
219 exploring the financial sustainability and scalability of alternative financial models and
220 micro-credential programs designed for these students presents a rich area for conceptual
221 development. Importantly, non-traditional students enrich the learning environment by
222 bringing diverse perspectives and real-world experience, fostering a collaborative learning
223 atmosphere.

224 A significant conceptual dynamic exists in the interplay between robust diversity and
225 inclusion initiatives and an institution's overall resilience and adaptability (Anderies et al.,

226 2013). As demographics shift and workforce demands evolve, universities that effectively
227 embrace diversity and cater to non-traditional students are better positioned to attract a
228 broader talent pool, foster innovation, and remain relevant to societal needs. The research
229 could conceptualize how fostering an inclusive environment contributes directly to
230 organizational learning, enhances problem-solving abilities through varied perspectives, and
231 strengthens the institution's capacity for continuous adaptation in the face of external
232 disruptions.

233 This suggests that diversity is not merely a social imperative but a strategic asset that
234 builds institutional robustness. Building on this understanding, a valuable contribution would
235 be the development of a "Holistic Student Success Framework" for African universities. This
236 framework would conceptually integrate academic, social, and administrative support
237 mechanisms specifically designed for diverse and non-traditional student populations. It
238 would draw on internal student data (e.g., retention rates, academic performance, engagement
239 in support services), administrative records, and qualitative feedback to identify key
240 predictors of success and areas for intervention. The framework would aim to provide a
241 comprehensive model for how university administration can proactively support a
242 heterogeneous student body, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and fostering an
243 environment where all students can thrive.

244

245 **RESEARCH APPROACHES AND DATA UTILIZATION**

246

247 The proposed research agenda is fundamentally conceptual, focusing on the development of
248 new theories, the significant challenging or clarification of existing theories, or the synthesis
249 of recent advances and ideas into fresh theoretical frameworks. This aligns with the mission
250 of leading management journals that seek theoretical insights advancing the understanding of
251 management and organizations.

252 A core methodological approach will involve the strategic utilization of conceptual
253 data models. These models are technology-agnostic, high-level, abstract representations of
254 the data an organization uses in its business operations (Sharma, 2024). They provide a big-
255 picture view of an organization's data requirements without delving into technical storage
256 details, aiming to create a shared understanding of the business by capturing essential
257 concepts. These models can structure readily accessible internal data, such as administrative
258 records (e.g., student enrollment, staff demographics, service delivery metrics), financial
259 reports (e.g., budget allocations, revenue streams), human resource data (e.g., training
260 participation, performance evaluations), IT system logs (e.g., digital platform usage), policy
261 documents, and qualitative feedback from internal surveys and stakeholder consultations.

262 Collaboration with business stakeholders is vital for creating these models, ensuring
263 they accurately reflect the essence of the business problem. Administrator's unique position
264 transforms internal administrative data from mere operational records into rich sources for
265 theory-building and conceptual validation. This data, often overlooked or underutilized by
266 external researchers due to access limitations, provides granular, real-time insights into
267 organizational processes, decision-making dynamics, and the tangible impact of
268 administrative interventions. For example, analyzing changes in staff training records in
269 conjunction with digital system adoption rates can directly inform theories of organizational
270 change management.

271 Similarly, examining budget allocations against stated strategic priorities can refine
272 conceptual models of resource governance and strategic alignment. This approach elevates
273 the value of internal data from purely descriptive reporting to a theoretically generative
274 resource, providing an empirical grounding for conceptual advancements. Building on this, a
275 highly effective research approach would be "Participatory Action Research." In this

276 methodology, any manager's ongoing administrative decisions, policy implementations, and
277 their observed outcomes within the university effectively become a "living laboratory" for
278 continuous conceptual refinement and theory generation.

279 The suggested approaches create a synergistic loop where administrative actions
280 directly inform theoretical development, and emerging theories, in turn, guide future
281 administrative strategies. This iterative process allows for the development of robust,
282 empirically grounded conceptual models that are immediately relevant and applicable to the
283 university's specific challenges, ensuring that scholarly output directly contributes to
284 institutional improvement.

285

286 **CONCLUSION: CHARTING A PATH FOR IMPACTFUL SCHOLARSHIP**

287

288 This strategic research agenda offers a compelling roadmap for senior public university
289 managers in Kenya, to embark on a journey of impactful scholarship. It is an agenda that
290 transcends traditional academic boundaries, positioning the university itself as a dynamic site
291 for knowledge creation. By focusing on conceptual frameworks that address critical areas
292 such as digital transformation, human capital and AI integration, financial sustainability, and
293 diversity and inclusion, the research will directly confront the complex challenges facing
294 African public universities.

295 The dual role of academician and manager creates an unparalleled opportunity for
296 engaged scholarship. It enables the development of management theories that are not only
297 academically rigorous but also deeply informed by the realities of public sector higher
298 education. The ability to leverage internal administrative data for conceptual model
299 development provides a unique advantage, transforming operational records into powerful
300 tools for theoretical innovation and practical guidance. This synergistic approach ensures that
301 the research is inherently relevant, addressing pressing institutional needs while
302 simultaneously advancing the broader field of management theory. Ultimately, this agenda
303 promises to yield valuable conceptual frameworks that will guide universities' strategic
304 evolution, enhancing their resilience, effectiveness, and responsiveness to societal needs in
305 Kenya.

306

307 **REFERENCES**

308

309 Agwoje, S. E., & Okeleke, M. C. (2023). Institutional leadership and the management of
310 change in the 21st century university education. *International Journal of Institutional*
311 *Leadership, Policy and Management*, 5(4), 393-417.

312 Alharbi, I. B. (2024). Strategic management: A comprehensive review paper. *International*
313 *Journal of Professional Business Review: Int. J. Prof. Bus. Rev.*, 9(3), 8.

314 Alhosani, K., & Alhashmi, S. M. (2024). Opportunities, challenges, and benefits of AI
315 innovation in government services: A review. *Discover Artificial Intelligence*, 4(1),
316 18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44163-024-00111-w>

317 Allsopp, D. H., DeMarie, D., Alvarez-McHatton, P., & Doone, E. (2006). Bridging the gap
318 between theory and practice: Connecting courses with field experiences. *Teacher*
319 *Education Quarterly*, 33(1), 19-35.

320 Anderies, J. M., Folke, C., Walker, B., & Ostrom, E. (2013). Aligning key concepts for global
321 change policy: Robustness, resilience, and sustainability. *Ecology and Society*, 18(2).
322 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26269292>

323 Bao, G. (2015). What theories are needed for strategic management? *Nankai Business Review*
324 *International*, 6(4), 433-454. <https://doi.org/10.1108/NBRI-05-2015-0012>

- 325 Barney, J. B., & Arikan, A. M. (2005). The Resource-based View: Origins and Implications.
 326 In M. A. Hitt, R. E. Freeman, & J. S. Harrison (Eds.), *The Blackwell Handbook of*
 327 *Strategic Management* (pp. 123-182). Wiley.
- 328 Baumgartner, R. J., & Rauter, R. (2017). Strategic perspectives of corporate sustainability
 329 management to develop a sustainable organization. *Journal of Cleaner Production*,
 330 *140*, 81–92.
- 331 Bleadly, A., Ali, A. H., & Ibrahim, S. B. (2018). Dynamic capabilities theory: Pinning down a
 332 shifting concept. *Academy of Accounting and Financial Studies Journal*, *22*(2), 1–16.
- 333 Buick, F., Blackman, D., O’Flynn, J., O’Donnell, M., & West, D. (2016). Effective
 334 Practitioner–Scholar Relationships: Lessons from a Coproduction Partnership. *Public*
 335 *Administration Review*, *76*(1), 35-47.
- 336 Callahan, K. (2007). Citizen Participation: Models and Methods. *International Journal of*
 337 *Public Administration*, *30*(11), 1179-1196.
- 338 Calori, R. (2007). Essai: Philosophizing on Strategic Management Models. In *Business Ethics*
 339 *and Strategy, Volumes I and II*. Routledge.
- 340 Campbell, H. (2012). Lots of words... but do any of them matter? The challenge of engaged
 341 scholarship. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *13*(3), 349-353.
- 342 Cavusgil, S. T., & Deligonul, S. Z. (2025). Dynamic capabilities framework and its
 343 transformative contributions. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *56*(1), 33-42.
- 344 Chaffin, B. C., Gosnell, H., & Cosens, B. A. (2014). A decade of adaptive governance
 345 scholarship: Synthesis and future directions. *Ecology and Society*, *19*(3).
 346 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26269646>.
- 347 Christensen, T., & Læg Reid, P. (2007). The Whole-of-Government Approach to Public Sector
 348 Reform. *Public Administration Review*, *67*(6), 1059-1066.
 349 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00797.x>
- 350 Delery, J. E., & Roumpi, D. (2017). Strategic human resource management, human capital
 351 and competitive advantage: Is the field going in circles? *Human Resource*
 352 *Management Journal*, *27*(1), 1-21.
- 353 Desmond, J., & Kotecha, B. (n.d.). *STATE OF THE UK GOVTECH MARKET*.
- 354 Elías, M. V. (2022). Practice as Lived Experience: The Missing Link in Public Administration
 355 Research. *Public Administration Quarterly*, *46*(1), 67-88.
- 356 Gulley, N. Y. (2021). Challenging Assumptions: ‘Contemporary Students,’ ‘Nontraditional
 357 Students,’ ‘Adult Learners,’ ‘Post-Traditional,’ ‘New Traditional.’ *SCHOLE: A*
 358 *Journal of Leisure Studies and Recreation Education*, *36*(1-2), 4-10.
 359 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156x.2020.1760747>
- 360 Guz, N. A. (2022). The digital transformation of higher education: Global trends and anti-
 361 trends. *Мир Науки, Культуры, Образования*, *3*(94), 99-104.
- 362 Hayat, D. Z. (2024). Catalysing Change: The Power of Effective Leadership in Driving
 363 Innovation. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, *30*(5), 3789-3793.
- 364 Jabareen, Y. (2012). Towards a sustainability education framework: Challenges, concepts and
 365 strategies—The contribution from urban planning perspectives. *Sustainability*, *4*(9),
 366 2247-2269.
- 367 Janssen, M., & Van Der Voort, H. (2016). Adaptive governance: Towards a stable,
 368 accountable and responsive government. In *Government Information Quarterly*,
 369 *33*(1), (pp. 1-5). Elsevier.
- 370 Knudsen, C. (1995). Theories of the Firm, Strategic Management, and Leadership. In C. A.
 371 Montgomery (Ed.), *Resource-Based and Evolutionary Theories of the Firm: Towards*
 372 *a Synthesis* (pp. 179–217). Springer US. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-2201-](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-2201-0_8)
 373 [0_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-2201-0_8).

- 374 Kuziemski, M., Mergel, I., Ulrich, P., & Martinez, A. (2022). *GovTech Practices in the EU*.
375 JRC Publications Repository. <https://doi.org/10.2760/74735>
- 376 Lengnick-Hall, C. A., Beck, T. E., & Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (2011). Developing a capacity for
377 organizational resilience through strategic human resource management. *Human*
378 *Resource Management Review*, 21(3), 243-255.
- 379 Liu, B. (2024). Strategic Planning and Resource Allocation in Higher Education Institutions.
380 *The Educational Review, USA*, 8(11), 1359-1364.
- 381 Loriston, I. P. (2018). *Informing BPM practice in Emergency Units of South African hospitals*
382 *for improved patient flow*. <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/28442>
- 383 Luo, K., Dang, S., Shihada, B., & Alouini, M.-S. (2021). Prospect theory for human-centric
384 communications. *Frontiers in Communications and Networks*, 2, 634950.
- 385 Makadok, R., Burton, R., & Barney, J. (2018). A practical guide for making theory
386 contributions in strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(6), 1530-
387 1545. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2789>
- 388 Makokha, G. L., & Mutisya, D. N. (2016). Status of e-learning in public universities in
389 Kenya. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 17(3),
390 341-359.
- 391 Mugo, P. (2020). Porter's five forces influence on competitive advantage in
392 telecommunication industry in Kenya. *European Journal of Business and Strategic*
393 *Management*, 5(2), 30-49.
- 394 Omwami, E. M. (2018). Devolution and Public University Infrastructure Development in
395 Kenya: A Post-2000 Rights-Based Development Agenda. In J. Zajda (Ed.),
396 *Globalisation and Education Reforms* Vol. 19, (pp. 107-122). Springer Netherlands.
397 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1204-8_7
- 398 Peters, M. A. (2013). Managerialism and the neoliberal university: Prospects for new forms
399 of "open management" in higher education. *Contemporary Readings in Law and*
400 *Social Justice*, 1, 11-26.
- 401 Pohling, R., Bzdok, D., Eigenstetter, M., Stumpf, S., & Strobel, A. (2016). What is Ethical
402 Competence? The Role of Empathy, Personal Values, and the Five-Factor Model of
403 Personality in Ethical Decision-Making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 137(3), 449-474.
404 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2569-5>.
- 405 Poister, T. H. (2010). The Future of Strategic Planning in the Public Sector: Linking Strategic
406 Management and Performance. *Public Administration Review*, 70(s1).
407 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02284.x>.
- 408 Pricop, O. C. (2012). Critical Aspects in the Strategic Management Theory. *Procedia - Social*
409 *and Behavioral Sciences*, 58, 98-107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.983>
- 410 Reenock, C., Konisky, D. M., & Uttermark, M. J. (2022). Chain of command vs. Who's in
411 command: Structure, politics, and regulatory enforcement. *Policy Studies Journal*,
412 50(4), 797-821. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12425>.
- 413 Rosenberg Hansen, J., & Ferlie, E. (2016). Applying Strategic Management Theories in
414 Public Sector Organizations: Developing a typology. *Public Management Review*,
415 18(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.957339>.
- 416 Sagala, G. H., & Ori, D. (2024). Antifragility, resilience and collaborative networks of SMEs:
417 A theoretical foundation. *European Journal of Innovation Management*.
418 <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ejim-09-2023-0797/full/html>.
- 419 Schwimmer, M., & Maxwell, B. (2017). Codes of ethics and teachers' professional autonomy.
420 *Ethics and Education*, 12(2), 141-152.
421 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2017.1287495>.
- 422 Serkina, Y. I., & Logvinova, A. V. (2019). Administrative management of universities:
423 Background and consequences. *Amazonia Investiga*, 8(22), 673-683.

- 424 Sharma, A. (2024). *Examining the Current Utilization of Conceptual Data Modeling in*
425 *Database Modeling Practices: Mixed Methods Research* [PhD Thesis, Loyola
426 University Chicago].
427 [https://search.proquest.com/openview/a125fb4aa24caf5d5d98a4db52936fc0/1?pq-](https://search.proquest.com/openview/a125fb4aa24caf5d5d98a4db52936fc0/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y)
428 [origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y](https://search.proquest.com/openview/a125fb4aa24caf5d5d98a4db52936fc0/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y).
- 429 Shattock, M. (2013). University Governance, Leadership and Management in a Decade of
430 Diversification and Uncertainty. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 67(3), 217-233.
431 <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12017>
- 432 Thilagavathy, N., & Venkatasamy, R. (2023). Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies
433 adaptation in business management. *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*, 18, 2485-2495.
- 434 Thompson, J. D. (2017). *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative*
435 *Theory*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315125930>
436