

Examining staff Perception on Operations Management (OM) as a Role for Senior Management or Organization from a Decision-Making and Ownership Perspective: Reconceptualization of OM in NGOs

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Abstract:- This paper explores staff perception of Operations Management in Non-Governmental Organizations to determine whether OM is a role specifically a Senior Management Team function, or a role that should be shared jointly across all organization levels as it involves decision-making and role ownership; reconceptualization of Operations Management in NGOs. By adopting a decision-making and ownership perspective, the study examines how Operations Management roles are understood and owned by different staff levels. The narrative presented in this research paper is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data. Data was collected from qualitative interviews conducted using Google Forms questionnaires distributed among various non-governmental organizations staff members from different departments and hierarchies, and a data analysis tool was employed. The questionnaires comprised pertinent questions that were derived from independent and dependent variables, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Key variables included organizational role level: Senior Management Team, support staff, program staff, admin staff; staff perceptions of Operations Management: ownership, decision-making and contribution to performance. By exploring these elements, the research fills the gap on who should be responsible for Operations Management decision-making and ownership within an organization. The study findings indicated the recognition and performance of Operations Management practices across all management levels. The study suggests that the Senior Management Team and all management levels are actively engaged in Operations Management through decision-making and ownership, which improves the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. However, the study exposed a gap in operational accountability among staff members, highlighting the issue of assuming responsibility without Operations Management understanding, which has an impact on the organization's performance. The study will contribute to the existing Operations Management literature, explicitly for the non-governmental sectors and similar organizations that are mission-driven.

Keywords: Operations Management; Role Ownership; Decision-making; Senior Management Team.

1. Introduction

Operations Management (OM) is recognized as an essential discipline for an organization. According to (Bamford et. al., 2023), OM is defined as a discipline that all managers are responsible for, stressing the necessity to operationalize their input as strategic plans into output. (Lewis, 2001) stated that NGOs attempt to create a highly flexible management system, which is built temporarily for the project groups and interconnected management; OM interconnects this flexible management system. NGOs have extensive operations across the globe, which

involve delivering services to volatile areas where access to resources, accountability and compliance expectations are a challenge. During these operations, robust operational systems are important, including functions of management namely; planning, organizing, leading, controlling, coordinating, directing and reporting. Many NGOs put more effort into technical and administrative functions, leaving the OM strategic as a responsibility to the organization and its SMT. The study necessitated the examination of how staff perceive their OM decision-making roles, whether exclusive to the SMT or an integral function across all management levels of the organization.

2. Literature Review

Decision-making is an ongoing process which starts from a point of a problem and leads to a conclusion that involves several strategic steps. In decision-making, no decision can be addressed without referring to the decision-making process, (Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2023) further outlines four different decision-making models. However, this study picked two related models from the four in line with this research; the Rational model, which is based on sequential steps that are logically set to lead to a decision, starting with problem identification, possible solutions analyzed and brainstormed. This model is believed to be effective, although it requires more time for discussion and brainstorm. (Uzonwanne 2016) recommended that the Rational model should be extensively included in the leadership training, which is a fundamental element of OM for driving efficiency and sustainability of an organization. The model aligns with OM practices as it is based on logic, evidence and structured analysis to guide a solution.

The second model - the Bounded Rational model, is based on partial or insufficient knowledge of the problem/situation or no understanding, and the decision is made unconsciously. (Lunenburg, 2010) suggested that decision-making is a process which consists of steps:- identification of the problem, generating alternatives, evaluating alternatives, choosing the best alternative, implementing the decision and evaluating the decision's effectiveness. NGO staff members, commonly referred to as service delivery staff, are often unaware of existing issues, including organizational gaps, due to their lack of involvement in decision-making processes, particularly in research and question formulation (Gooding, 2017). The findings of Gooding revealed a notable knowledge gap among staff members concerning their inclusion in the decision-making process which describes the Bounded Rational model. Such inclusion is important in nurturing a collective and effective work atmosphere through OM. (Holcombe et al. 2004), highlighted that non-formal education and participatory approaches have assumed responsibility within village programs being run by NGOs through the work of field staff. In that context, the implementation of OM poses a challenge due to the engagement of non-educated field staff, which hampers the effectiveness of decision-making, leaving a gap in OM accountability to SMT. Although (Heyse 2013), noted that decisions made within the NGO organizational setting can lead to positive or negative outcomes; however, the particular context in which decisions are being made is critical. Common challenges in humanitarian crises are a lack of information or inaccurate information, which weakens the effectiveness of decision-making. Based on NGO settings, it would not necessarily result in good decisions or positive outcomes, as they can also generate problems if there is missing information, which is commonly the case in humanitarian crises.

(Bansal A et al 2025), urged that leaders, as SMT efficacy is revealed in their attitudes, preparedness, reactions and knowledge, which allow them to excel in decision-making irrespective of the approach they choose to use. (Artinger F et al, 2025), stated that despite fostering authentic leadership behaviour, organizations can empower their employees to protect themselves in their decision-making and to cope with uncertainty more effectively.

Role ownership: In an organization, ownership is referred to self-obligation to the organization in terms of results and obligation to act on items that impact results, (Wilms, 2017). The results of actions rely on the individual entrusted with the authority to oversee specific tasks and to make informed decisions. The situation is, however, weighed and an option is selected for strategic implementation, which plays a crucial role in OM of an organization. Ownership is regarded as a key internal element of governance mechanisms of organizations, which has implications for decision-making and outcomes, (Munisi, 2024). Role ownership of employees is supported by giving them power in the decision-making process, which grants them a sense of psychological ownership. The participation has proved positive effects on organizational service delivery if role ownership has been granted to

employees in the organizational decision-making process, (Javed, 2018). By allocating ownership rights to staff members, organizations can foster a more productive environment (Del Sordo & Zattoni 2025), which positively impacts OM on service delivery. The literature reviewed highlights a consensus that granting role ownership to staff members facilitates improved business operations and enhances efficient service delivery. This approach fosters accountability of role ownership, which has an impact in the decision-making process especially when staff members feel self-obliged commitment to the overall process.

Below is a Denison Model (1995) – Involvement trait diagram is an OM tool used to measure and strengthen employee involvement, ownership and responsibility. The model, however, highlights how much employees are engaged, empowered and aligned to the organizational goals.

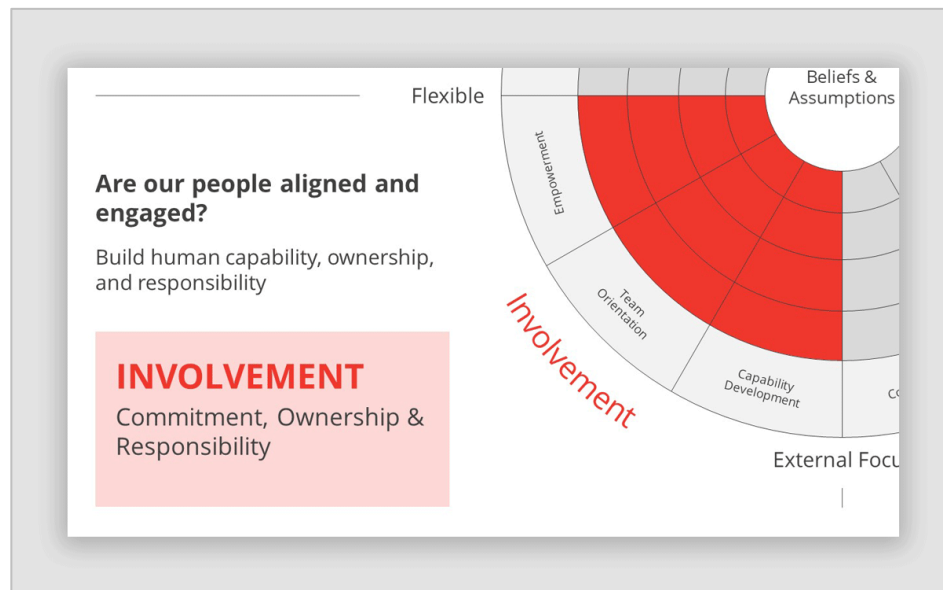


Figure 1 - Source: Denison Model – Involvement Trait (1995)

Considering philosophies related to OM, it is evident that without proper use of OM tools such as the Denison Model or frameworks, organizations are likely to encounter challenges in OM implementation, streamlining and optimize resource allocation efficiently through lack of OM role ownership, responsibility and staff decision-making.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the interconnection that links decision-making, role ownership and operations management. The framework illustrates the connection between independent variables and dependent variables;

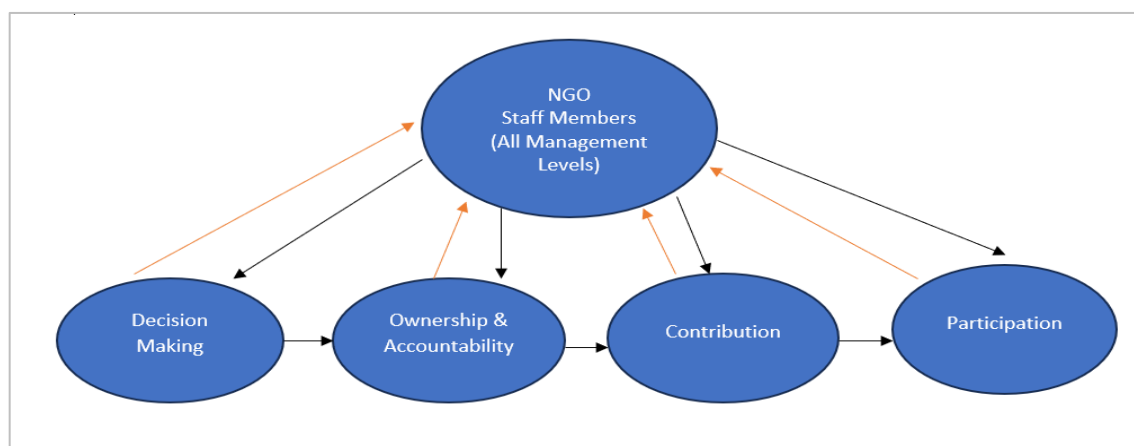


Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework**4. Statement of Problem**

Operations Management is predominantly linked with the manufacturing industries, where it is regarded in the production of goods. Although OM involves several management functions such as planning, coordinating, scheduling, controlling and inventory management, the NGO sector has not been conceptualized with OM roles. This ambiguity has resulted in different perceptions among staff members on whether OM is a responsibility of SMT or a collective organization function. The absence of shared understanding and ownership of OM creates challenges in decision-making, accountability and role ownership, which ultimately affects operational effectiveness. Centralizing OM in NGO sectors may result in weak systems and staff disconnection, leaving OM without clear ownership, as there is no dedicated OM department to provide apparent oversight. Research on NGO staff perceptions on OM ownership and its influence on decision-making is limited. This research gap has constrained NGOs in the development of operational frameworks that align staff ownership and decision-making, suggesting that reconceptualizing OM could simplify some staff roles to enhance the effectiveness of organizations.

5. Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to evaluate the perception of OM's decision-making responsibility and ownership within an organization on whether it relies on SMT or the organization. The study explores the impact of responsibility and ownership on the efficiency of business operations and service delivery within the NGO sectors in Harare, Zimbabwe. The objectives specifically examined were;

- i. To analyze staff perception on the role of OM
- ii. To examine the extent to which staff members are involved in the OM decision-making process
- iii. To propose a reconceptualized framework for OM which integrates role-ownership and decision-making.

6. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative data because of its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research minimizing the limitations of both approaches (J.W. and J.D. Creswell; 2018). Data was collected from qualitative interviews conducted using Google Forms questionnaires distributed among various NGO staff members from different departments and hierarchies, and a data analysis tool was employed. For feasibility and manageability, the study comprises a sample size of 30, a selection from different NGO staff members based in Harare, Zimbabwe and statistical tools such as data visualization on Google Forms and descriptive statistics were used.

7. Data Analysis**7.1. Source of Information and Data Collection**

To obtain accurate data, NGO staff members in Harare, Zimbabwe, were contacted through Google Forms to gather their perceptions on OM's role and the level of decision-making. Out of 30 circulated questionnaires, 27 responded, and the response statistics on the level of management are tabulated in Table 1 below;

Table 1: Management Level

#	Management Level	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
1.	Top Level (Executive/Directors)	2	7.4
2.	Middle Level (Managers)	13	48.1
3.	Lower Level (Supervisors/Programs)	5	18.5
4.	Support Team	4	14.8

5.	Other Staff members	3	11.2
	Total	27	100

Table 2 tabulation exemplifies that the research data was primarily obtained from NGO staff members who possess extensive work experience in the sector with more than six years. Remarkably, this group constituted a significant majority of respondents, accounting for 74.1% of the staff members who partook in the survey.

Table 2: Period in the NGO Sector

#	Period	Years in NGO	% of Respondents
1.	Less than 1 year	3	11.1
2.	1 – 3 years	2	7.4
3.	4 – 6 years	2	7.4
4.	More than 6 years	20	74.1
	Total	27	100

Table 3 below indicates that the programs department constituted 37% of the highest responses, who seem to have a greater involvement level in the programs' operations, which aligns with organizational goals. This is followed closely by the administration department, with 33.3% of responses on engagement in the day-to-day operations of the organization. In contrast, the operations department, with 18.6% of responses, appears to be underrepresented or non-existent within the NGO sector.

Table 3: Respondents' Departments

#	Department	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
1.	Programs	10	37
2.	Administration (Finance/HR/Procurement/Log)	9	33.3
3.	Monitoring and Evaluations (M&E)	1	3.7
4.	Operations	5	18.6
5.	Other	2	7.4
	Total	27	100

7.2. Presentation of Data

This study aimed to evaluate the perception of OM's decision-making responsibility and role ownership within NGOs, specifically examining whether these responsibilities and ownerships are attributed to SMT or the organization. The responses came from different NGO staff members with extensive work experience within the sector. The responses were measured using a Likert scale, which ranked categories from 1 to 5 using ordinal scale, 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree and 5: Strongly Agree. Also, a multiple-choice question was paused, presenting different options for selection.

7.2.1. Perception of OM – Understanding the Role of OM within an Organization

The responses revealed a clear consensus on the understanding of the role of OM within their organizations, 13 respondents (48.1%) strongly agreed and 12 respondents (44.4%) agreed that they comprehend the role of OM. Only 2 respondents (7.4%) were neutral, reflecting uncertainty about the role of OM within their organization.

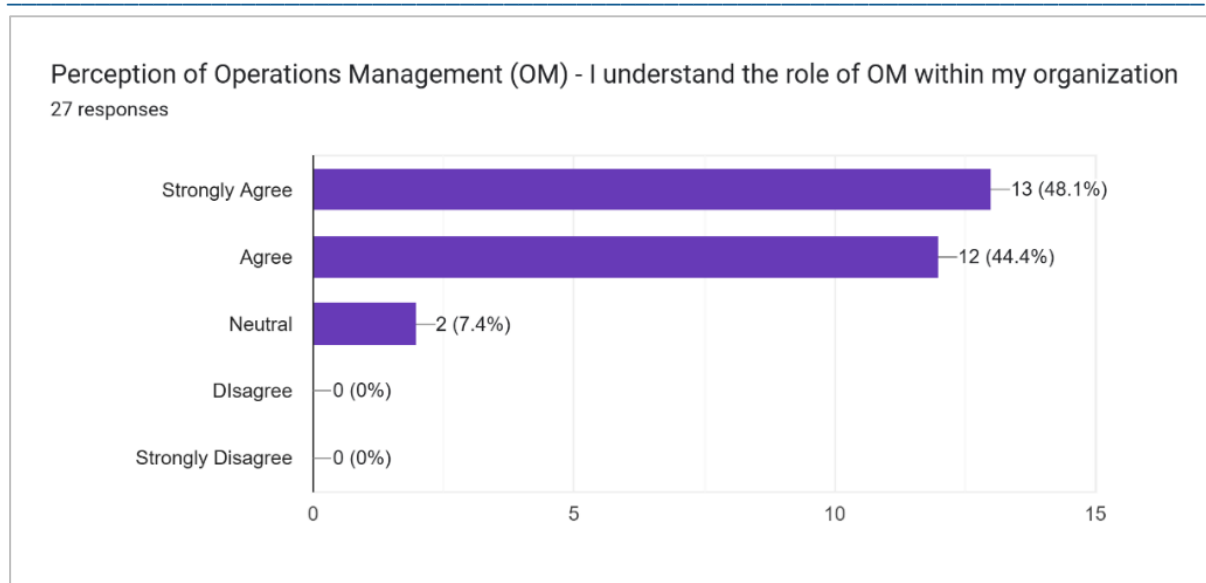


Figure 3: Source – Study Survey

7.2.2. Operations Management Responsibility

OM responsibility is recognized and the responses indicated that 17 respondents (63%) of staff members regardless of role or department are responsible for OM in an organization, 7 respondents (25.9%) agree that it is the role of SMT, 2 (7.4%) say it is the role of operations department and 1 (3.7%) have no clue on who is responsible for OM within an organization.

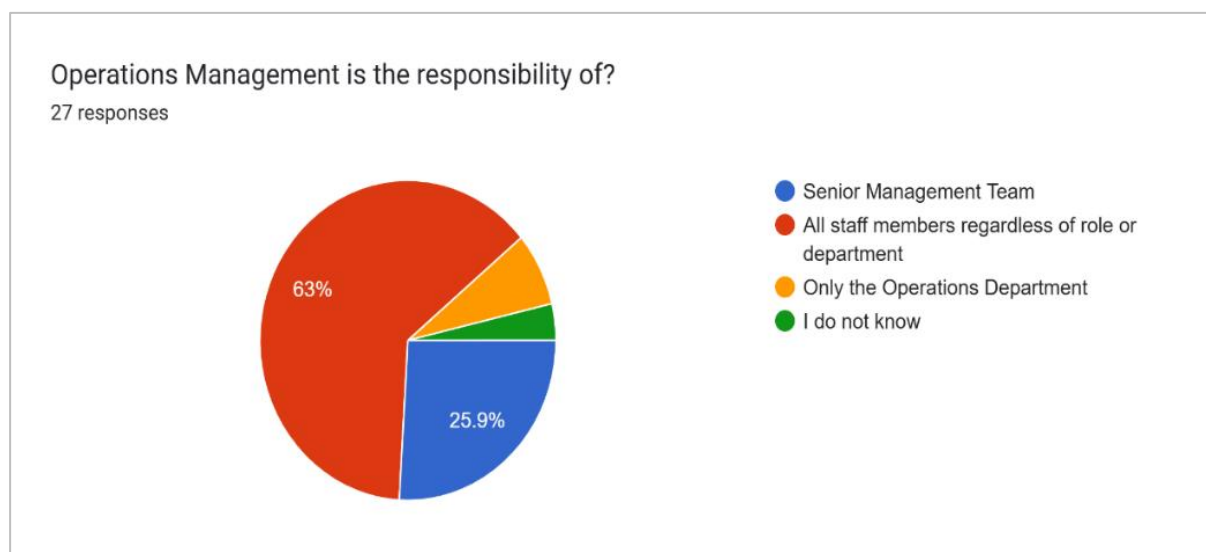


Figure 4: Source – Study Survey

7.2.3. Individual Contribution and Responsibility to Operational Efficiency

The responses revealed a consensus among staff members regarding their contributions and responsibilities for operational efficiency within their organisations. Specifically, 17 respondents (63%) strongly agreed, and 9 respondents (33.3%) agreed that they contribute to and take responsibility for operational efficiency. In comparison, only 1 respondent (3.7%) was neutral, again reflecting uncertainty about their contribution and responsibility to operational efficiency.

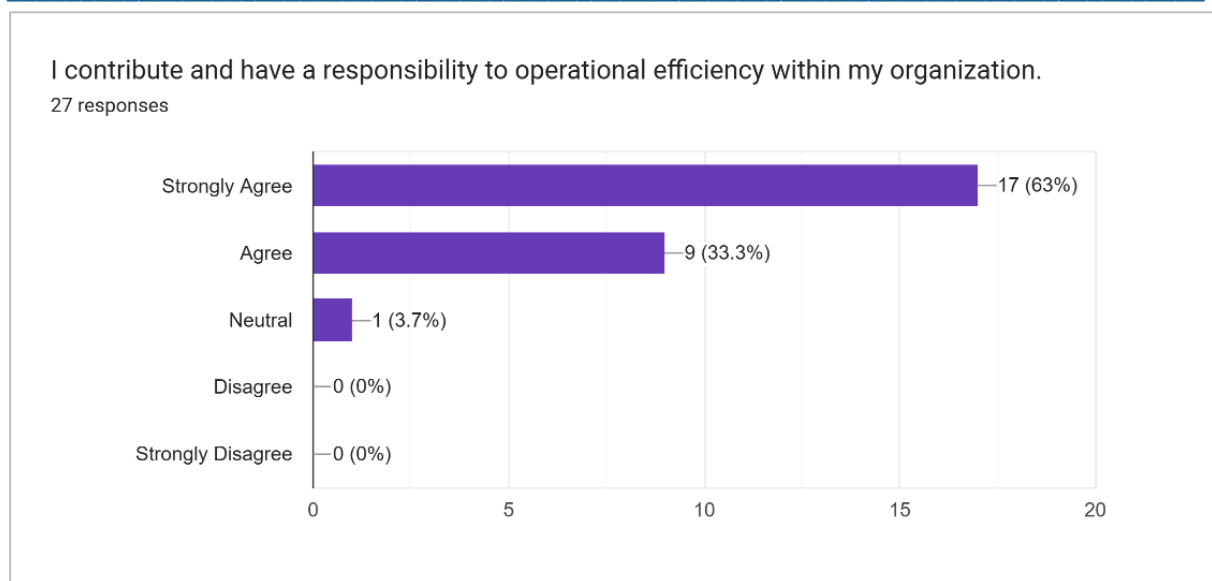


Figure 5: Source – Study Survey

7.2.4. Relevance of OM in an Organization and its Importance to the Success of an Organization

The responses indicated that 19 respondents (70.4%) strongly agreed and 6 respondents (22.2%) agreed that OM is relevant in an organization and very crucial for the success of the organization. Only 2 respondents (7.4%) remained neutral, possibly due to a lack of understanding or inclusion in the operational strategies of an organization.

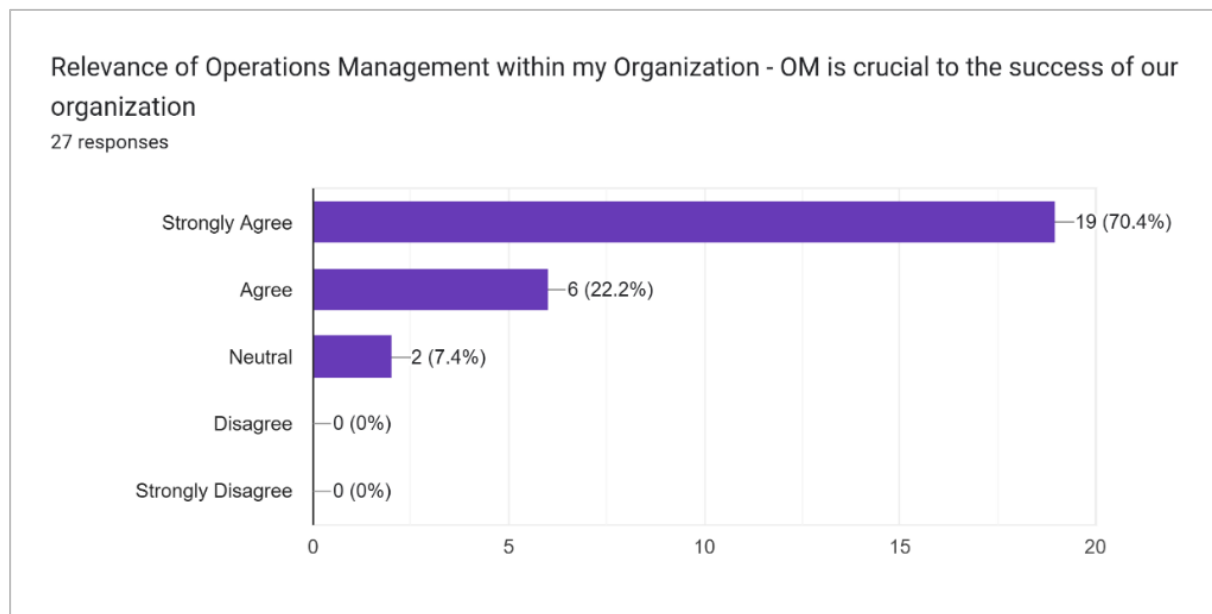


Figure 5: Source – Study Survey

7.2.5. Alignment of OM within Department/Unit with Organizational Goals

The alignment of OM within the department results showed that 15 respondents (55.6%) strongly agreed, and 6 respondents (22.2%) agreed that OM in their departments or units is aligned with organization's goals. In the evaluation, only 5 respondents (18.5%) were neutral, and 1 respondent (3.7%) completely disagreed that OM within the department or unit is aligned with organisational goals.

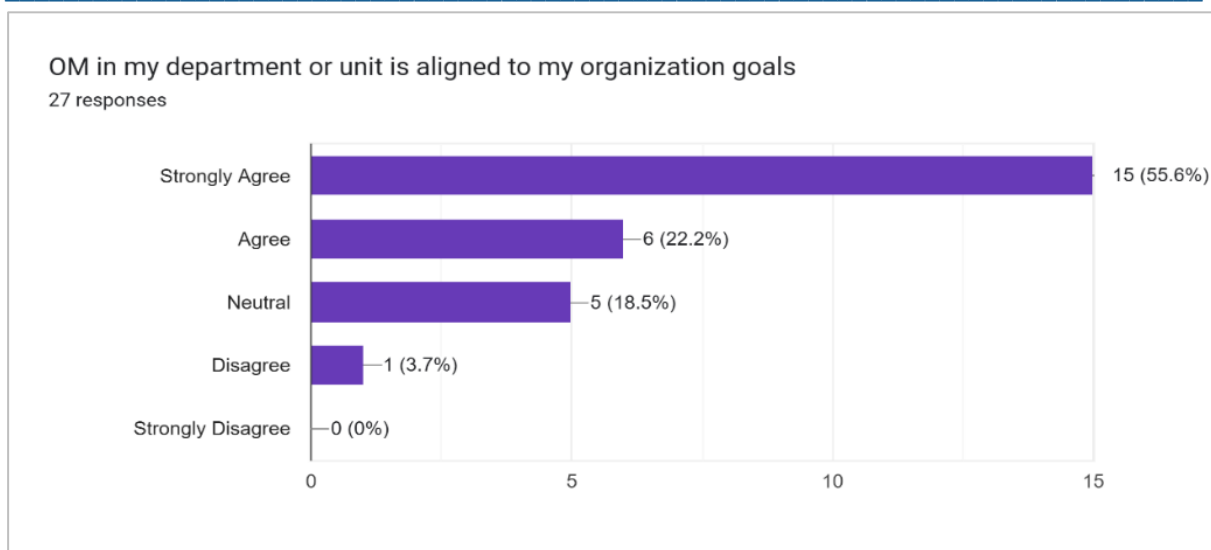


Figure 6: Source – Study Survey

7.2.6. Execution of OM – Staff Knowledge (Trainings, Procedures and Policies)

The findings indicated that 7 respondents (25.9%) strongly agreed, and 13 respondents (48.1%) agreed that they possess comprehensive knowledge of OM and have received acceptable training on OM, procedures and policies. 7 respondents (25.9%) were neutral, suggesting a lack of OM knowledge, training, procedures and policies.

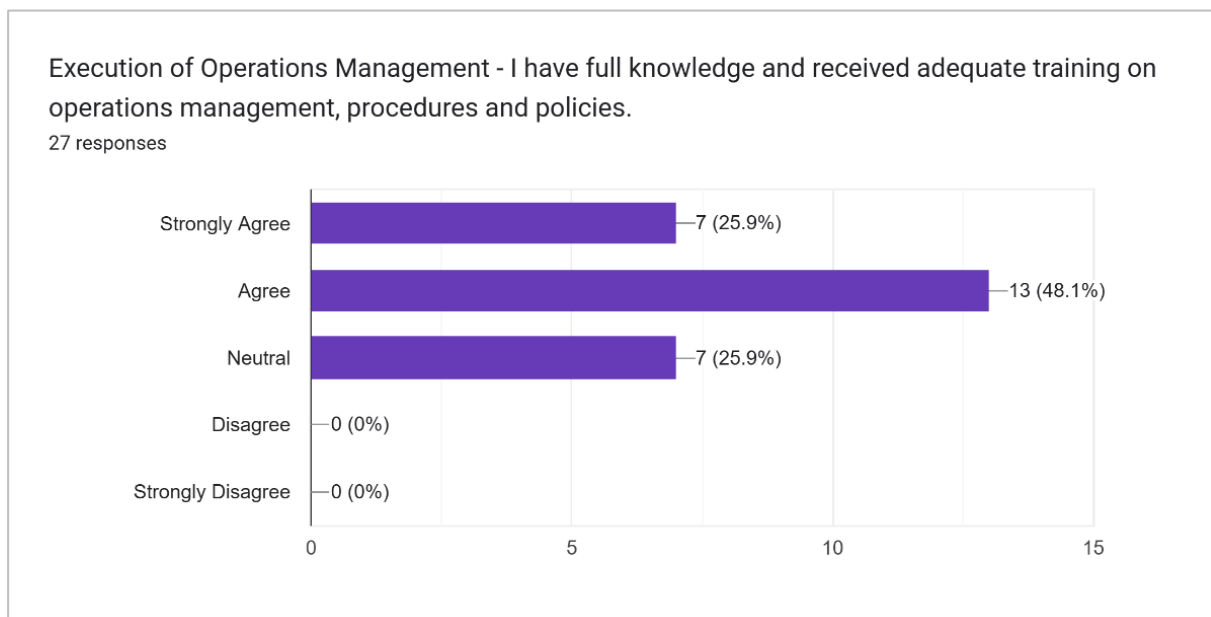


Figure 7: Source – Study Survey

7.2.7. Staff Participation in Operations Decision-Making

The staff's participation in operations decision-making responses highlighted that 12 respondents (44.4%) strongly agreed, and 8 respondents (29.6%) agreed that they participate in operations decision-making processes and also make decisions about the organization's operations. 6 respondents (22.2%) were neutral, and 1 respondent (3.7%) disagreed in participating in operations decision-making.

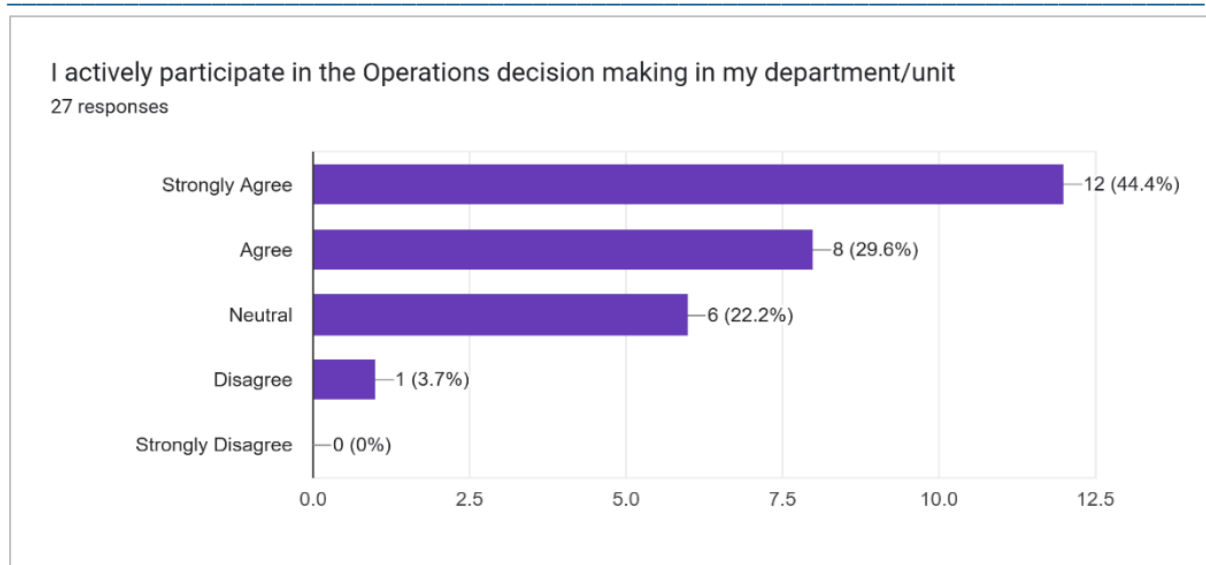


Figure 8: Source – Study Survey

7.2.8. Contribution to Organization Performance - Link between OM and Organization Programs

When assessing whether there is link between OM and organization programs, 13 respondents (48.1%) strongly agreed, and 13 respondents (48.1%) agreed that there is a link between OM and organization programs which, contribute to the organization's performance. 1 respondent (3.7%) was neutral, suggesting uncertainty about OM contribution and a link to organization's performance.

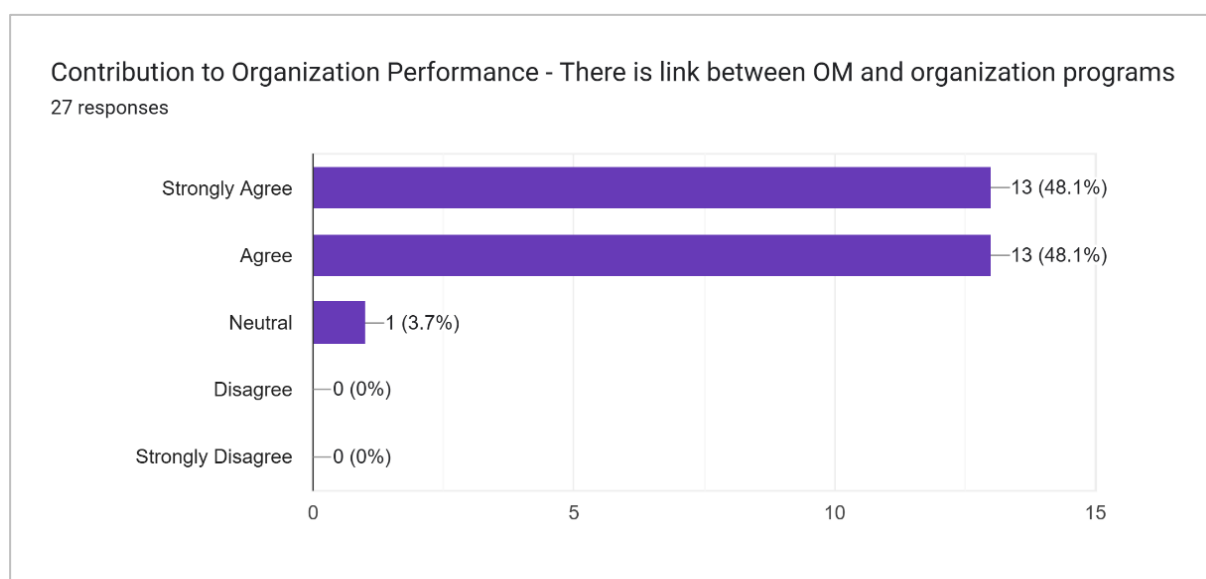


Figure 9: Source – Study Survey

7.2.9. Effective OM Improves Organizational Performance

A clear majority of 19 respondents (70.4%) strongly agreed and 7 respondents (25.9%) agreed that effective OM improves the performance of an organization. 1 respondent (3.7%) remained neutral and 1 respondent (3.7%) disagreed with it.

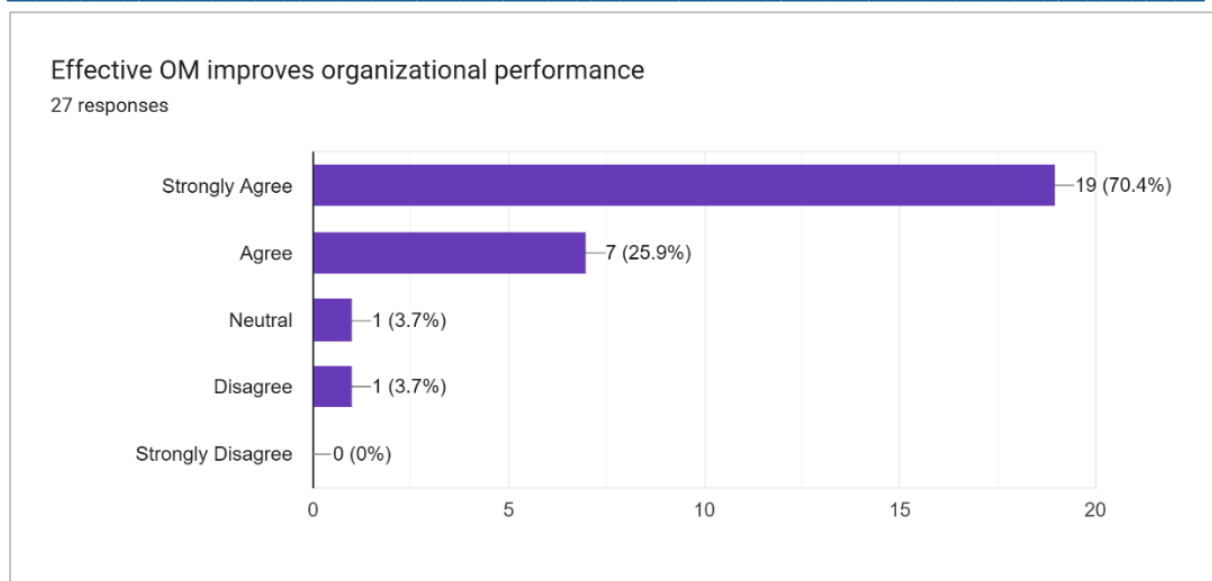


Figure 10: Source – Study Survey

8. Findings of the Study

RO1: To analyze staff perception on the role of OM, whether it is SMT's responsibility or a collective organizational role - the study findings revealed that NGO staff members recognise the role of OM as their responsibility, regardless of management hierarchy, as an essential part of their roles. This recognition is closely knotted to the concept of role ownership, where staff members are likely to take full charge of the consequences. This attitude suggests that SMT are not exclusively burdened with the obligation to take accountability and responsibility or OM within the organization. However, Jenkins (2025) argued that SMT often takes ownership, particularly in decisions that impact other departments without a complete understanding of the problem.

RO2: To examine the extent to which staff members are involved in the OM decision-making process – the degree to which NGO staff members are involved in the OM decision-making process has been significant. Wolniak (2019) argued that the Operations Manager should possess the necessary skills to fulfil their duties and responsibilities, as their interest lies in the decision-making, MasterClass (2022). However, this research has demonstrated that staff members from all departments are involved in OM decision-making regardless of their position and hierarchy.

RO3: To propose a reconceptualized framework for OM which integrates role-ownership and decision-making – below is a reconceptualized framework for OM.

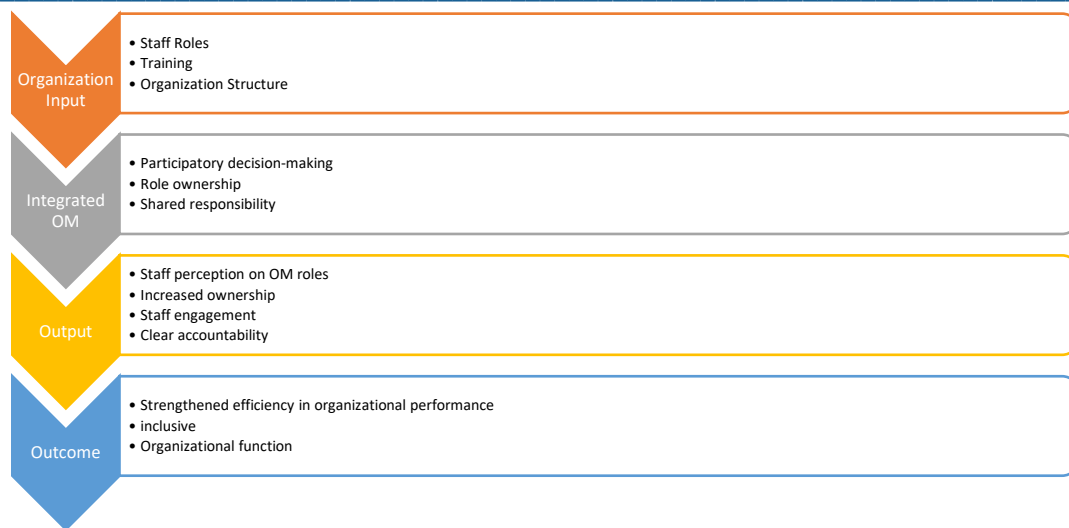


Figure 11: Reconceptualized OM Framework

Source – Researcher's Creativity 2025

9. Recommendations

9.1. Policy Recommendations

- To make OM an organization function through developing policies that define OM as a shared responsibility for all departments/units.
- To include OM in staff job descriptions (JD), individual appraisals, key performance indicators (KPI) and organizational strategic plans.
- To implement a shared accountability mechanism so that staff members contribute to OM plans and outcomes.
- To creating a culture for taking OM responsibilities to be owned by individuals and departments.
- To invest in staff OM training, building capacity in decision-making, problem-solving and OM tools for operational efficiency, such as OM frameworks.

9.2. Technical Recommendations

- To develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for departments which are related to OM processes
- To invest in OM technological tools, such as software, to enhance accountability and responsibility
- To conduct regular compliance internal and external audits to check adherence to OM procedures to mitigate operational risk

10. Conclusion

The study set out to reconceptualize OM in NGO by examining staff perception on whether it is the responsibility of SMT or the organization to take responsibility and ownership pertaining to OM. The findings highlighted that staff members are aware of OM and the roles they take regarding OM decisions and ownership, although customarily, OM has been centralized at the SMT level. However, the absence of a dedicated OM department leaves a clear gap of role ownership and limited staff participation in operational decision-making due to inadequate training, clear guidelines and policies.

The proposed reconceptualized framework puts OM in an inclusive and engaging function that integrates both role ownership and decision-making across all management levels. The model will improve organizational performance, effectiveness, staff empowerment and sustainability.

11. Limitations and Future Research

The current research has a few limitations, that future researchers can address. The data collected was from Harare, Zimbabwe NGOs only, hence, for better generalization of findings of the study, different countries can be further examined. Future studies may use the proposed reconceptualization of the OM framework to examine other OM perceptions in different organizational contexts for a deeper understanding of Operations Management in the NGO sector.

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