Planning expertise, variables influencing performance outcomes and management of wedding organization firms in Nairobi County, Kenya.

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Abstract
Best practices are essential to the survival of Kenyan firms in tourism. Though diversification into wedding organisation has attracted investment from Kenyan entrepreneurs, hardly any information has been documented on them. This study evaluated wedding planning expertise, variables influencing performance outcomes and methods used to manage constraints. Wedding planning expertise ranked highly among wedding planning firms. Furthermore, the stepwise multiple regression model indicated that seven constraints influenced 94.7 per cent of the variance in wedding planning. Based on these results, event management firms can communicate performance and direct resources towards constraint elimination resulting in enhanced business performance and firm survival.

Key words: Performance, Constraints, Expertise, Weddings.

1.0 Introduction
Tourism is arguably the world’s largest industry and contributes to global economic development and job creation. In Kenya, the tourism industry enabled the realization of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation goals between 2003 and 2007 and has since been recognized as one of the six sectors that will drive economic growth towards the achievement of Kenya Vision 2030 (GoK, 2009). Despite the importance of tourism to the Kenyan economy, the sector is faced with several critical issues namely: increased wildlife and asset degradation, tired product offerings in need of upgrading and diversification, constrained business environment with weak institutional backup and a work force with limited capacity to consistently deliver quality tourism experiences (World Bank, 2010).

According to the Economic Survey of 2012, Kenya earned KSh 92.9 Billion from the tourism sector in 2011 alone (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This contribution though substantial can further be increased. One of the strategies to deal with these challenges and increase tourism earnings has been the diversification of tourism products to include ecotourism, sports tourism and cultural tourism (GoK, 2008). Additionally, entrepreneurs in the tourism industry can further expand their business interests by planning and hosting events (Goldblatt, 2005). Though the Meetings, Incentives, and Conventions are an addition to the traditional beach and safari products (GoK, 2007) offered by destination Kenya, personal events such as weddings, funerals and initiation ceremonies have long been celebrated by many tribes across the country (Sobania, 2003).

Nonetheless, it has only been in recent times, that the professional organization of special events particularly weddings have grown in popularity among Kenyans (Noella, 2011). Of all events, weddings can be the most complicated to organize as they involve friends and family and a wide range of service related activities ranging from catering to entertainment as well as the formal aspect of the marriage itself (Goldblatt, 2005). Pursuant to the elaborate demands associated with wedding planning an increasing number of couples are turning to accredited wedding organizers (Shone & Parry, 2004). Therefore professional practices and a premeditated design approach should be applied to maximize performance (Matthews, 2008).

Events need to be well understood given the significant contribution they make to travel
and tourism (Getz, 2012). Since each event is unique in terms of management, settings and people involved an enquiry into best practices is essential to attaining benefits associated with event tourism (Sven, 2010). For event planning firms, susceptibility to failure has largely been attributed to lack of formalization, standardization, accountability and continuous improvement practices (Silvers, 2004). Despite these vulnerabilities, research into events has focused mainly on authenticity, socio-cultural impacts and effects of event tourism while policy, planning, business and management have remained largely unexplored (Getz, 2008, p. 409).

Given that tourism activities including wedding planning are dominated by Small and/ or Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005) their performance is imperative for economic growth and strengthening of economies (Alasadi & Abdelrahim, 2007). Distinctly, SME’s in Kenya struggle with performance and stiff competition resulting in high business failure rates (KIPPRA, 2009). Consequently, the Kenyan government has acknowledged the need to improve the SME sector so as to increase its contribution to GDP and employment creation (KIPPRA, 2009).

Notwithstanding, the profiles of event organization firms, expertise in task execution and performance related issues were yet to be ascertained. Such enquiries have been done in the United Kingdom (Gould, 2011), Singapore (Henderson, Foo, Lim, & Yip, 2010), Canada (Lang Research Inc, 2006) and The United States of America (Litvin & Fetter, 2006).

Therefore, this study sought to fill this gap by profiling wedding planning firms, determining planning expertise, variables that influence firm performance and management of wedding organization firms. Additionally, the study also sought to ascertain the impact of identified variables on the wedding planning process.

2.0 Literature review
2.1 Event tourism
The word “Event” is derived from the Latin word “eventus” which is translated as happenings out of the ordinary (Sven, 2010). In the tourism context an event is defined as “a unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs” (Goldblatt & Nelson, 2001, p. 181). According to the International Special Events Society (ISES) events are one of the world’s fastest growing and economically lucrative industries (Sven, 2010). In addition, events enable destinations to improve their tourism product offerings, enhance attractiveness, expand the tourist season, spread tourism geographically and animate static attractions and facilities resulting in urban renewal and development (Veres, Clark, & Golbourne, 2008). This demonstrates the significant impact of special events to travel and tourism.

The number, diversity, and popularity of festivals and special events have grown spectacularly over the past several decades (Getz, 2012). The growth of the special events industry can be attributed to increasing levels of average disposable income, frequent, short-term holiday breaks and increased interest in experiential travel, authenticity and culture (Jago, 1997). The interactions within the setting, people and management systems are unique to every type of event (Getz, 2008).

2.2 Weddings
Weddings can be the most complicated events to organize as they involve friends and family and a wide range of service related activities ranging from catering to entertainment as well as the formal aspect of the marriage itself (Shone & Parry, 2004). Planning a wedding requires multiple tasks and times that may be intertwined in ways that make both their representation and their execution highly complex (McKenzie & Davies, 2010, p. 788). Although the day of the actual event may consist of the wedding ceremony itself followed by a reception and buffet the planning may take several months and involves large numbers of people (Shone & Parry, 2004). Because of such complications and also due to the growing length of days, size of budgets, widened scope and limited time availability, people are turning to event planners to organize this important milestone (Goldblatt, 2005).
2.3 Wedding planning stages

All successful events go through five critical stages namely, research, design, planning, coordination and execution and evaluation (Goldblatt, 2005; Monroe, 2006). Wedding planners’ services offerings are usually related to performing individual or combined tasks in the aforementioned stages. Research is the first stage which involves determining goals, objectives, needs and expectations of event stakeholders thus forms the background for decision making in all operations (Sven, 2010). The second stage is design which entails the creation of an environment to satisfy stakeholder needs thus achieving the objectives of the event. This is a creative process that brings together different ideas that contribute to uniqueness of the event (Sven, 2010). At the end of this phase the planner puts together a program, budget and concept proposal (Matthews, 2008). It is also during this phase that feasibility studies, SWOT analysis, site and venue comparison and selection are done (Allen, O’Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2008).

Planning is the third stage in events management that involves the management of scarce resources such as time, money and human resources. The amount of time available for planning and for actual production of the event can dramatically affect the cost and success of the event (Silvers, EMBOK: The Proposed Knowledge Domain Structure, 2004). The event manager must allocate time for pre-event client meetings, site inspections, meetings with vendors, communication and contact preparations, actual event time for arrival through to departure, and post-event billable time (Monroe, 2006). The more complex the event, the more likely it is to be labour intensive in organization and operation (Shone & Parry, 2004).

Coordination and execution go hand in hand to bring the event to life. To orchestrate the event, the event planner has to coordinate human resource volunteers, negotiate vendor contracts, coordinate logistics integration between participants, service the stakeholders and monitor quality standards (Goldblatt, 2005). The last stage is event evaluation which measures success and improves the organization of future events (Monroe, 2006). Evaluation can take place during the planning process or at the end of the event (Reid, Event stakeholder management: developing sustainable rural event practice, 2011). This gives the event organizer background, feedback and experience in human relations, counselling, organization, financial management and negotiation (Allen et al., 2008). Eventually this will influence organization of the next event (Goldblatt, 2005).

2.4 Wedding planning tasks

a) Determining Stakeholder Goals and Objectives

In planning a wedding there are lots of stakeholders other than the bride and groom who have varied goals. There are several goals for participating in and organizing events including religious requirements, demonstration of political power of a ruling class, social reasons that reaffirm ones status and membership in social groups, educate people about history and culture and commercial reasons to generate funds (Goldblatt, 2005). Event managers are therefore required to identify and balance a wide range of stakeholders’ needs and objectives (Berridge, 2007). Once this stage is concluded the event planner develops a statement of work which is a document including the event objectives, list of stakeholders, the draft budget, the scope of the event, schedules and outlines of responsibilities (Bodwin, Allen, Harris, McDonnell, & O’Toole, 2012).

b) Creating Customized Events and Proposal Development

Once the goals, needs and expectations of stakeholders attending the event are identified, the couple then settles on the tone for the wedding as elegant, romantic, spiritual, casual, festive or themed (Bain, Guine, & Radford, 2011). The wedding planner can make creative suggestions to the couple that will increase the cohesiveness of event (Lluch & Lluch, 2011). Once the tone for the event has been determined formal aspects such as décor, the attire, the ceremony and the food are decided on by the couple under the wedding planner’s guidance (Bain et al., 2011). All these ideas are then compiled by the wedding planner and represented in a way that will assist staff in task performance. The use of
project management tools, particularly the Work Break-Down Structure (WBS) which aggregates the tasks to be performed under headings such as venue or site, finance, décor and catering among others can ease event organisation (Bodwin, Allen, Harris, McDonnell, & O'Toole, 2012). Subsequently, tasks that fall under each heading are then listed exhaustively. Once this has been done, this information is then presented to the couple in the form of a proposal.

c) Budget Preparation
The budget is put together based on the style of the wedding, number of guests and they type of the reception the couple intends to have (Bouchard, 2003). Wedding planners assist couples with budget preparations by providing a budget summary illustrating the percentage and amounts allocated to each aspect of the wedding such as music, entertainment, catering and transportation among others (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). In most cases the largest portion of the budget is the reception which can take up as much as 40% of the budget (Bouchard, 2003). The wedding planner also ensures that the couple indicates who will pay for what expense as well as timelines for coming up with the money (Nixon, 2007).

d) Putting Together a Program
There are two types of programs required by an event manager namely the operational event program and the program of events (O'Toole & Mikolaitis, 2002). The operational event program is a detailed document that identifies tasks to be performed and assigns responsibilities within the event planning team. Additionally, the WBS which was used in proposal development can also be used to identify tasks to be performed prior to, during and after the event (O'Toole, 2007). Furthermore, this information can be represented in the form of a Gantt chart which provides visually appealing, easy to follow schedule of tasks and performance timelines (Shone & Parry, 2004). The program of events outlines details of the day of the ceremony (DeLaubenfels, Weber, & Bamberg, 2010). Specifically, it contains the order of the ceremony, names of the bride and groom, names of participants according to their importance processional songs and hymns, directions to the reception and any additional notes (Cox & Franz, 2007). Moreover the program thanks guests and contributors to the event, reiterates the theme of the event using words, symbols, quotes and images, sets the mood before the event begins and makes any announcements (Riley, 2008, p. 27).

e) Time Management
Time management is critical to the planning process given that most events take place within a fixed time scale (Shone & Parry, 2004). The wedding planner has to estimate the duration it will take to organize and execute the entire event using available resources (Project Managment Institute, 2008). The average planning period is usually 18 months in the UK and US wedding planning markets (2008 UK Wedding Industry Statistics, 2009; The Wedding report inc, 2012). During this period the planner develops a time plan that has to allocate time for specific tasks such as pre-event client meetings, site inspections and vendor meetings (Goldblatt, 2005). The wedding planner may meet the couple/client an average ten times prior to the event (Contemporary Bride). During preliminary meetings with clients the planner finds out clients details, the number of attendees, aspects the planner should handle, when and where the client would like to hold the event. Subsequent meetings that take place nine to six months before the event include tasks such as finalization of guest lists, select and making deposits with vetted and selected vendors and service providers. During the last eight weeks prior to the event, the planner finalizes and confirms all plans made with vendors and makes necessary payments. The planner may also confirm guest attendance and tally the final guest list.

f) Site Comparison and Selection
The venue for the wedding is usually selected based on the size, style and ambiance; whether the couple wants to have the ceremony at a special location or at the same site as the reception, commute time for the couple and guests (Viau, 2011, pp. 68-70). The planner then advises the couples on venue selection based on budgetary allocations and wedding packages that accompany shortlisted venues (Bywater, 2007). Wedding venues include ballrooms, mansions and historic buildings,
private members clubs, art galleries, ranches, rustic farms, urban lofts, homes, gardens, beaches, boats and wineries (DeLaubenfels et al., 2010).

g) Negotiation of Vendor Contracts
Vendors are defined as “individuals or entities receiving payment for goods and services that pertain to the implementation of the wedding” (Daniels & Loveless, 2007, p. 104). These include caterers, photographers and videographers, musicians and Disc-jockeys, florists, transport coordinator and jewellers. Vendors should provide a list of references that can vouch for their ability to deliver quality service based on performance during past events (DeLaubenfels et al., 2010). Wedding planners should be able to negotiate discounts for the couple and/or kick-backs for themselves with vendors they have worked with before (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Vendors on the other hand aim to provide services and products of exceptional standards to ensure wedding planners continue to recommend their services to future clients (Lluch & Lluch, 2010, p. 19).

h) Coordination Tasks
Prior to the wedding the wedding planner may perform coordination tasks such as helping clients select vendors and confirm contracts and make down payments on time (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). During the event, the wedding planner can oversee as many aspects of the wedding as the bride requires (Peragine, 2008). This includes coordination of all vendors and their employees by directing them on how and where to set up, transportation of guests and participants and directing the couples relatives and friends in activities such as taking photographs (Wilkolaski & Phillips, 2006).

i) Post Wedding Evaluation
Evaluation enables the wedding planner to (1) obtain feedback on tasks carried out successfully or poorly (2) prioritize package deals to include necessary services or eliminate unnecessary ones (3) criticism can help the planner’s products stay fresh based on current needs (4) provides information on the target market (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Information on event success can be achieved by debriefing with the client at the end of the event (Moran, 2009). The client can provide information that will assist in planning future events and feedback can be shared with vendors the planner works with regularly to improve performance. The wedding planner can also request for feedback from the vendors who collaborated on the event (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

j) Theory of constraints
Organizations are always striving to attain goals, do better in the future and surpass client expectations (Reid & Cormier, 2003). TOC is a management philosophy that is used to understand and improve business performance (Boyd & Gupta, 2004) resulting in increased efficiency and responsiveness to customer demands in a competitive and dynamic marketplace (Reid, 2007). TOC views every business as a chain of interrelated processes that are geared towards that attainment of an organizational goal. The weakest link within the process can limit the performance of an entire operation (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Consequently, firms need to identify the constraint, decide how to exploit the constraint, subordinate everything else to the constraint, elevate the system constraint and return back to step one to prevent inertia.

k) Identification of Constraints
It is important to identify constraints and prioritize them according to their impact on the goals of an organization (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Initially, constraints fell under two categories: either physical or managerial (Rahman, 1988). While physical constraints occur when a given activity, operation or process in the system has insufficient capacity to fully satisfy market demand, managerial constraints occur in the form of policies, procedures, rules and methods that limit an organizations operational capability or restrict its flexibility in meeting the system goal (Reid, Applying the TOC fice Focusing Process in the Service Sector: A Banking Subsystem, 2007). Constraints were further classified into seven basic categories: market, resource, material, supplier, financial, knowledge, competence and policy constraints (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Though two or more constraints often appear to be acting concurrently, there is usually only one single restriction or limiting factor that is often caused by constraint (Boyd & Gupta, 2004).

i) Market Constraints
Market constraints are concerned with lack of demand for a product or service (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Demand is defined in economic terms as the quantity of a commodity or service that a community is willing and able to buy during a given period (Archer, 1980). Demand for tourism products and services may be determined by factors in the macro business environment such as economic factors, demographic factors, geographic factors, socio-cultural attitudes, mobility, government regulation, media communications, information and communication technology, environmental concerns and international political developments and terrorist actions (Middleton & Clarke, 2012). Expressly, demand for event tourism is driven by social and psychographic factors including the need for social integration, interaction between individuals and communities, mutual support, bonding and reinforcement of social norms (Shone & Parry, 2001, p. 26).

In addition to the aforementioned determinants of demand, service features have a strong influence on demand (Pfister & Tierney, 2009). While demand for basic services results from customers having no choice, anticipated, augmented and possible services attract customers due to superior service offerings and value (Pfister & Tierney, 2009). Events by the very nature of their description offer unique experiences that appeal to a variety of people (Goldblatt & Nelson, 2001, p. 181). Wedding planners therefore have to ensure that they offer superior, customized service offerings and orchestrate events that are of value to stakeholders and surpass client expectations (Bain et al., 2011).

**ii) Resource Constraints**

Entrepreneurs combine factors of production to create products and services that meet market demand (Tribe, 2012). In economics these inputs include natural resources, labour, capital and entrepreneurship (Gitman & McDaniel, 2008). Resource constraints are concerned with lack of people, equipment or facilities to satisfy demand or services (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Though tourism demand often fluctuates, resource supply is relatively fixed (Evans, Campbell, & Stonehouse, 2003). Lack of resources due to unavailability or unaffordability can hamper growth and expansion of the business (Nissanke & Aryeetey, 1998).

The shortage of skilled personnel in the tourism and hospitality industry can be attributed to the challenge of attracting and retaining staff (Leigh, Webster, & Ivanov, 2012). This challenge is caused by characteristics of the tourism industry including low wages, unfriendly shift patterns, poor or non-existent career structures, informal recruitment practices and lack of trade unions (Keep & Mayhew, 1999). Wedding ceremonies and receptions can be held in one or more locations including religious grounds, hotels, inns, aquariums, resorts, members clubs, ballrooms, parks, gardens, country clubs, historic estates and atriums (Bain et al., 2011). The wedding planner advises the couple on venue selection based on the capacity of grounds, rental costs, service charges and taxes and restrictions and special requirements of hiring a venue (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Despite the availability of a large number of venues that may meet the aforementioned criteria, some are available only to couples who belong to associated communities (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Additionally, the array of venues is further limited when a large number of venues offer packages including catering and sound which further limit the ability of the couple to customize the event (Bouchard, 2003). Poor access to prime materials by firms is a major cause of business failure in the SME sector (Smith & Smith, 2007). Material constraints are a result inability to obtain required materials in the quality or quantity required to satisfy the demand for products and services. Material constraints result from a shortage of materials seasonally, during peak times or at all times and/ or as a result of unforeseen events (Ronen, Pliskin, & Pass, 2006). Access to materials is further aggavated by poor cash flow to obtain materials of the quality and quantity required.

**iii) Supplier Constraints**

Tourism suppliers operate independently but are highly dependent on each other (Inkson & Minnaert, 2012). Suppliers in wedding planning include caterers, calligraphers, balloon artists, décor companies, entertainment companies, florists, invitation designers, lighting companies, linen specialists, makeup artists, power
suppliers, rental companies, tent companies, transportation cake providers, videographer and wedding cake designers (Moran, 2009). The wedding planner selects suppliers based on service specifics, pricing and quality of goods, inventory selection, references, client list, and years of experience in business, service area, staffing capabilities, professionalism and responsiveness to inquiries (Moran, 2009, p. 107).

Supplier constraints are caused by unreliability of a supplier in responding to orders (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). This may be attributed to financial, quality or internal control problems within the suppliers company(Sadgrove, 2005). Firms should therefore not rely on one supplier and institute a warning system. Wedding planners are encouraged to archive brochures or information on all vendors, maintain a list of vendors who can support varied themes and request for references when working with new vendors(Moran, 2009).

iv) Financial Constraints
According to TOC, financial constraints are defined by insufficient cash flow to sustain an operation (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Cash flow is defined as money flowing into a business through sales revenue, debt or equity financiers and money flowing out of the business through purchases and operating expenses(Longenecker, Moore, Palich, & Petty, 2006). Cash flow problems may be attributed to insufficient over drafts; delinquent debtors, overinvestment, underinvestment, delinquent suppliers and buyers credit (Reid, Jacobsen, & Anderson, 1993). Other causes of financial constraints include the inability to obtain outside funding, insufficient capital, heavy operating expenses, poor money management, inability to obtain trade credit, insufficient trade credit and inability to meet financial obligations(Lownes-Jackson, Olorunniwo, Flott, & Ellzy , 2003). Businesses in the tourism sector are susceptible to financial constraints given the fluctuations in demand, deferred payment by clients and economic fluctuations in the macro business environment (Getz, Carlsen, & Morrison, 2004). Cash flow forecasts can be used to anticipate surpluses or deficits in finances (Tassiopoulos, 2008). Notably, cash flow forecasts should be done after carefully analysing competitors, markets and determining profit margins (Getz et al., 2004). Additional ways of improving cash flow include: collecting payments cash on delivery, issuing invoices on time when credit is given, giving viable discounts for prompt or advance payments, facilitating use of credit card and online payments, management of debtors, leasing and hiring equipment rather than purchasing it, reducing personal drawings and matching repayment schedules to receipt of funds (Tassiopoulos, 2008).

v) Knowledge Constraints
Knowledge is an important asset for all business as it provides a strong platform upon which firms can gain competitive advantage by enhancing organizational capabilities (Schiuma, 2012). Knowledge constraints are caused by lack of information to improve business performance (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Despite the vast amount of trade-related information available and the possibility of accessing national and international databases, many small enterprises continue to rely heavily on private or even physical contacts for market related information. This is due to inability to interpret the statistical data (Muteti, 2005) and poor connectivity especially in rural areas. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean SMEs need to team up and partner with larger organizations to promote and facilitate knowledge sharing for improved performance(OECD, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012).

vi) Competence Constraints
Competence constraints are defined by limited skill levels necessary to perform tasks required to remain competitive. Skill requirements for wedding planners include: the ability to coordinate and consolidate resources, creativity and vision, calculated risk taking, tolerance for ambiguity, problem solving skills, strong management and organizational skills (Peragine, 2008). Planners coordinate and supervise the activities of interns, friends and relatives, professional organizations and trained staffing agencies (Moran, 2009).

There are numerous institutions providing training and advisory services that aim to bridge the skill gap(Kayanula & Quarte, 2000).
However, some entrepreneurs cannot afford to upgrade their skills while others do not find it necessary due to complacency (Abor & Quartey, 2010). In addition to these factors, staff poaching, inability to diagnose competency needs and low employee enthusiasm for skill upgrades are contributors to lax competence development in firms (Panagiotakopoulos, 2011). Consequently, management opts to employ skilled employees rather than develop their in-house competence base.

vii) Policy Constraints

Lastly, policy constrains are rules, regulations and business practices that inhibit progress of an organization by restricting the systems productive capacity (Watson, Blackstone, & Gardiner, 2007). Policies rules, regulations and guidelines direct an organization towards achieving its mission and vision by providing a framework for decision making and action plans with an organization (Policies and Procedures, 2013). Policies also relate set objectives to personnel and physical resources (Sekhar, 2010). Policies may be formulated at various levels of the organization either by top management, owners of the enterprise or at departmental level by supervisors or heads of department (Agarwal, 2008).

There are five types of policies that originate from various sources namely: originated policies, implied or traditional policies, policies by fiat, appealed policies and externally imposed policies (Agarwal, 2008). While originated policies are formulated by top management, implied or traditional policies are not formally sanctioned but guide decision making based on a precedence. On the other hand, a policy by fiat is a policy announced by the top manager in a capricious manner and can be changed as often as is suitable. Additionally, appealed polices result from decisions made by superiors in the organization in the absence of or inadequacy of existing policies. Lastly, policies may be imposed on a firm by external sources including the government, trade unions, chambers of commerce and community.

2.5 Exploitation of Constraints

Deciding how to exploit the constraint ensures management focus on eliminating all waste or non-productive time and activities at the constraint (Reid, Applying the TOC fice Focusing Process in the Service Sector: A Banking Subsystem, 2007). Managers exploit the constraint by making every minute that a constraint is operating, as effective as possible in moving the system toward its goal. Exploitation is further achieved through changes in organizational procedures and policies that are currently used to manage the constraining factor rather than making changes that involve significant monetary outlays (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001).

a) Subordination of everything else above the Constraint

Subordination focuses on managing the non-constraining system elements or resources so that their behaviour is synchronized with and fully supportive of the strategy being utilized in the management of the constraint (Reid, Applying the TOC fice Focusing Process in the Service Sector: A Banking Subsystem, 2007). Subordination of non-constraints focuses managerial attention on utilizing their capabilities to support performance increases in the constraint. This involves changes in practices or policies and can be implemented without incurring major increases in expenses (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001). Another approach to subordination is to operate the non-constraining resources in such a manner as to assure that the constraint will never be without something productive to do (Reid, Applying the TOC fice Focusing Process in the Service Sector: A Banking Subsystem, 2007).

b) Raise Constraint Capacity

The constricting resource may be elevated by increasing its amounts which involves an outlay of capital to acquire and/or operate additional manpower and/or equipment to enhance the constraint’s capability (Reid, Applying the TOC fice Focusing Process in the Service Sector: A Banking Subsystem, 2007). Performing a careful situational analysis before implementing action plans to alleviate an existing internal constraint because a new constraint might surface that is more difficult and/or expensive to manage than the existing one (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001).

c) Preventing Inertia

Once the constraint has been eliminated, it is important to go back to step one and identify a new constraint (Reid, Applying the TOC fice

3.0 Methodology
The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design that allowed the researchers to test for existing differences among wedding organisation firms with regard to their expertise, constraints and constraint management methodologies. Nairobi, the largest city in Kenya was purposefully selected as the study location. The target population consisted of all wedding organisation firms in Nairobi. Given that there is no formal data base of wedding planning firms in Kenya, the researcher obtained a listing of wedding planners in Nairobi from KenyaWeddings.co.ke. This directory was selected as the sampling frame because it offered a comprehensive and fairly credible list of service providers for weddings. Based on the normal approximation to the hyper geometric distribution in the formula for small populations a total of 30 firms out of the 31 listed in the sampling frame were included in the study sample. Out of the 30 firms sampled, 2 firms were randomly selected to pre-test the research instruments while the remaining 28 managers from wedding organisation firms were sampled as respondents. Event managers were purposefully selected to participate in the study as respondents given that they oversaw and coordinated all aspects of the event management process and had required information on the study objectives. Purposively sampling experts ensures that the research efforts are focused on gathering rich data on the topic under study (Blankenship, 2010, p. 86).

An interview schedule containing open ended and closed ended questions was administered to respondent event managers. The interview schedule contained questions on the company profile, stage of event organization at which clients approach the firm, the firm’s ability to carry out wedding organization tasks, variables that influence performance and methods used to manage performance issues. The responses from the interviews were then coded, tabulated and edited for analysis. All quantitative data was analysed using an electronic statistical package. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize quantitative data using frequencies. Multiple regression was then used to establish the impact of constraints on wedding planning. Qualitative data was organized into themes and analysed manually and conclusions drawn.

4.0 Results and discussions
The results and discussions of the study were presented in six main sections namely: firmographic profile of wedding planning firms, expertise in wedding organisation, variables influencing performance outcomes, impact of variables on the wedding planning process and constraint management methodologies adopted by wedding planning firms.

4.1 Firmographic Profile of Wedding Planning Firms
Firmographic data on wedding planning firms was represented under the following subtopics: age, employees within firms, and demand for wedding organization services offered (Table 4.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firmographic Variable</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firm age/ Duration of operation</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-8 years</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 8 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>91.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>56.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand for wedding planning services offered</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning (resource management)</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordination and Execution</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Firm age/ Duration of operation
Firstly, the findings in table 1 indicate that 4 per cent of wedding planning firms had been in operation for a period of less than one year. This implied that the wedding organisation industry could still attract new entrants. Markedly, industries that are able to consistently attract new players offer lucrative revenues. This may be attributed to increased popularity and demand of special events offering unique experiences by Kenyans (Noella, 2011). This increase in local demand corresponds with the trends in developed and developing countries for events to fill up leisure time (Pfister & Tierney, 2009). If this assertion is anything to go by, the number of new entrants may continue to rise over time. This finding was consistent with forecasts by the Bureau of Labour Statistics in United States of America that project an increase in the number of wedding planners from 71,600 in 2010 to 102,900 by 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012-13).

Secondly, the study revealed that majority of wedding organisation firms (87 per cent) had been in operation for between 2 and 8 years. This implied that between 2003 and 2010 businesses in Kenya may have had a supportive operating environment. Markedly, it was between 2003 and 2007 that economic growth accelerated from 2.9 percent in 2003 to 7.1 percent in 2007 before the political crisis of December 2007 (KIPPRA, 2009). The factors that contributed towards a stable business environment during that period were informed by the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS). Evidently, favourable economic conditions strongly favour business start-up (Kumar, Poornima, Abraham, & Jayashree, 2003).

Conversely, the number of firms that had been in operation for over 8 years was conspicuously low (Table 1). This implied that a large number of firms were likely to reach the decline stage at the 8 year mark. This decline can be attributed to a number of factors ranging from compromised learning abilities, profit reduction and loss of market share and stiff competition. Arguably, firms that managed to avoid the decline stage had implemented transformative changes resulting in superior financial performance and increased market share relative to competitors. However, factors such as entrepreneurial burnout which occurs overtime has largely been touted as the main cause of loss of interest and divestment by entrepreneurs in Kenya (Bowen, Morara, & Mureithi, 2009). Consequently, entrepreneurs instead look for other ventures that capture their interest (Longenecker, Petty, Moore, & Palich, 2006).

4.3 Number of employees
Wedding planning firms employed staff on a permanent and temporary basis. Consequently, firms were able to operate the business with staff who handled routine and/or long term business activities while casual staff were engaged to handle one-off tasks with short and fixed timeframes. This suggested that wedding planners were able to create a stable yet adaptable working environment that suited the labour demands of individual weddings. The combination of models in the correct ratio are likely to influence performance of firms in the long run (Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003).

However, the number of casual staff was almost twice that of permanent employees. This suggested that wedding planning firms relied heavily on external employment models. This can be attributed the very nature of weddings which may take a long time to plan but require a sizable number of staff to execute tasks simultaneously on the day of the event. On one hand, this increased the firms’ flexibility to labour demands for weddings, yet it also posed challenges for firms in retention of core skills and competences that had been developed in casual staff. Notwithstanding this challenge, numerous firms continue to rely on temporary employees, independent contractors and consultants (Matusik & Hill, 1998; Rousseau, 1995; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995) citing the main benefit of external employment models as enhanced resource and functional flexibility, without the costs associated with permanent staff.

4.4 Demand for wedding planning services offered
The study also revealed varied demand for wedding organisation services (Table 1). In
descending order, couples contracted planners to coordinate and execute the event on the wedding day (95.7 percent of couples), design the event (87 percent of couples), plan the wedding (73.9 percent of couples), evaluate event success (52.2 percent) and conduct research on stakeholder goals (56.5 percent). The reasons that have influenced the demand for these services individually were illustrated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Reasons for demand for varied wedding organisation services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wedding organisation service</th>
<th>Reason for demand for planners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and execution</td>
<td>Numerous tasks to be performed sequentially on the wedding day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Coordination of logistics among volunteers, guests and vendors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Main stakeholder (couple) is unable to perform tasks on the wedding day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Demand for unique, memorable and themed weddings that reflect individual personality, lifestyle, values, attitudes and occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning (Management of time, human resources and finances)</td>
<td>Fixed timeframes to bring together a wide array of elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use of standardized tools and procedures to manage scarce resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of event success</td>
<td>Accountability of resources used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research into stakeholder goals, need and expectations</td>
<td>Benefit from expert advice to start the wedding organisation project correctly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority (95.7%) wedding planning firms indicated that they signed contracts with couples to coordinate and execute the event on the final day. This indicated that there were clients who felt that they were likely to benefit from the planners expertise in managing the wide array of tasks, logistics and coordinating suppliers and human resources on the final day. Notably, wedding days are usually abuzz with activities that at times need to be handled simultaneously and in a timely manner. Interestingly the main stakeholder of the event (the couple) is usually unable to perform any of the tasks personally on the final day. It is against this backdrop that couples largely opted to contract planners who were involved in planning, had experience and resources to effectively carryout crucial tasks. These findings are similar to those of a survey by The Knot on over 21,000 American couples who got married in 2009 (The Knot Unveils 2009 real weddings survey results, 2010). The survey revealed that 48% of brides who hired wedding planners did so to ease coordination and execution of the event on the final day.

Secondly, 87% of wedding planning firms indicated that couples also contracted them to design the actual event. This implied that a large percentage of couples valued a unique and memorable event. This may partly be attributed to clients expectations that a wedding should be a reflection of an individuals’ personality, lifestyle, values and attitudes and even occupation. This is supported in literature by the black box model of consumer behaviour which acknowledges the impact of consumer characteristics on service or products purchase decisions (Keegan, Moriarty, & Duncan, 1992, p. 183). Certainly, wedding planners are usually creative (Monroe, 2006) and are therefore able to theme events that reflect consumer characteristics. This finding was similar to that of the Wedding Market Survey by the Bridal Association of America which indicated that though majority of brides prefer traditional weddings, over 24% aim to create unique weddings (Bridal Association of America, 2006).

Thirdly, 73.9% of wedding planning firms indicated that couples contracted them to manage time, financial resources and human resources. This implied that clients placed a great deal of importance on taking a planned approach to resource management by contracting a wedding planner. Failure to deliberately adopt a planned approach to
resource management for projects with high levels of complexity (such as weddings) could result in substitutions, additions and deletions which consume time, finances and effort (Goldblatt, 2005). Since wedding planners organized weddings regularly, they developed standardized tools and techniques to manage various elements of the event.

Notably the use of checklists and project management tools such as Gantt charts and Work Breakdown Structures enabled planners to identify all elements required to host the event, determine human resource requirements for the event, and assign timelines for the performance of tasks. The adoption of these tools and techniques was necessary given that planning may take several months, and involve large numbers of people including families, friends, venue management, caterers, florists, dress hire companies, musicians, care hire companies, religious authority and civil registrar among others (Shone & Parry, 2004). In the United States of America, couples and their planners usually have between 12 and 16 months after announcing the engagement to plan the wedding with a budget of between $70,000 and $13,000 (Jaeger, 2011). Accordingly, the management of resources is paramount.

Fourthly, measuring event success ranked poorly (52.2%) in comparison to other planning tasks that clients contracted wedding planners to perform. This finding suggested that couples felt that weddings were one-off occasions and therefore they did not need to go over the outcomes given that they assumed they were only consuming the services of the wedding planner only for the one wedding. For that reason any information garnered from measuring event success would not be used by the couples for future purchasing decisions as weddings were regarded as one-off milestones in society. That said, clients were reluctant to meeting the planner after the wedding. The planners therefore carried out this task in the clients’ absence. Unfortunately, lack of input from the client on the outcome of the event may influence the ability of the firm to assess its performance and work towards improving events in the future (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

Lastly, only 56.6% of wedding planners indicated that they were contracted by couples to set goals and determine needs and expectations prior to planning a wedding. This implied that almost half (43.4%) of the couples set their goals disjointedly from the wedding planner. Though this seemed disconcerting, this sort of behaviour is common when consumers purchase infrequently used, expensive and unfamiliar services (Pride & Ferrel, 2007). By their very nature, event planning services fall into this category given that weddings are special events. In this case a substantial amount of research was done by the couple on their needs and expectations as well as the alternatives available for fulfilling those needs and expectations. Consequently, majority of the couples approached the wedding planner after informally determining the needs, goals and expectations for the wedding. The outcome of this stage largely determined the tasks the couple contracted the wedding planner to perform.

Notably, failure to formally communicate set goals to the wedding planner can have a negative impact on subsequent stages of planning the event. It would likely result in low morale among the planning team and challenges in evaluation and control of the event. Additionally, failure to collectively set goals with the wedding planner and the planning team can lead to an imbalance in meeting the wide variety of goals for wedding attendees. Furthermore, couples lack expertise that comes with organizing weddings, they were likely to set inappropriate goals that are not specific, measurable, attainable and realistic or time bound (SMART). Collectively, the adverse effects of informal goal setting can result in failure on the day of the event.

4.5 Expertise in performing wedding planning tasks

The findings on expertise in task performance by wedding planning firms were summarised in Figure 1 below. Overall, the study revealed a high adeptness in the performance of majority of wedding planning tasks. Markedly, tasks whose performance was below par were identified as debriefing and monitoring of standards after the event. The findings and discussions on task performance were presented under the following subtopics: determining stakeholder goals and objectives, creating a wedding environment
tailored to clients specifications, putting together a proposal, budget preparation, putting together a program, site comparison, site selection, creating time for pre-event client meetings, creating time for site inspections, creating time for vendor meetings, negotiation of vendor contracts, coordination of logistics and integration among participants and coordination of human resources.

Figure 4.1: Expertise in Performance of Wedding Planning Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing staff and clients after the wedding</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring standards</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of human resources</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of logistics and integration</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation of vendor contracts</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating time for vendor meetings</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating time for site inspections</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating time for pre-event client meetings</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site selection</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site comparison</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting together a program</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget preparation</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting together a proposal</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a tailored wedding environment</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining stakeholder goals and objectives</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6 Identifying stakeholder needs, goals and expectations

Majority (81%) of wedding planners exhibited above average proficiency in identifying stakeholder goals, needs and expectations. This implied that the planner worked closely with the couple during this first stage and was therefore able to tailor the event to their needs. Getting the couples perspectives assures customized service output (Bitner, Faranda, Hubbert, & Zeithaml, 1997). Ideally, planners utilized preliminary sessions with the couple to determine what they expected from the event, why they were hosting the event, who was likely to attend and where and when the event would be held. The high level of expertise exhibited in the performance of this task can be attributed to the ability of planners to articulate the couple’s needs and use experiences from past events to develop and prioritize goals and objectives. Subsequently, wedding planners were able to establish direction, identify expected results and enhance teamwork and individual performance.

Failure to adequately perform this task may be caused by the inability of some planners...
to get clients to articulate all their needs. Notably, in the identification of stakeholders wedding planners included questions on the needs, goals and expectations of other stakeholders attending the event other than the couple. These included the couple's families and network of friends. It is important to identify all stakeholders' needs for event success and acknowledge the role of the planner in balancing a wide range of needs and expectations (Berridge, 2007).

4.7 Design
Creating a wedding environment tailored to the couples' goals was also performed very well by majority (80.6%) of the planners. This implied that wedding planners were able to create weddings that were unique for each couple based on their vision. This may be attributed to the strong creative abilities of wedding planners. Wedding planners have an array of creative skills based on past careers as florists, scenic designers and display artists (Monroe, 2006). In addition, successful completion of this task was enabled by firms involving clients in the development of goals and objectives and the tone and theme of the event that were then included in the proposal prepared by the wedding planner (Bain et al., 2011; Lluch & Lluch, 2011). Other studies on designing and delivering captivating experiences at conventions reiterate the need for event planners to employ creativity and innovation in order to create enjoyable experiences and gain competitive advantage (Kale, Pentecost, & Zlatevska, 2010).

4.8 Proposal development
Majority of firms (86.9%) also indicated that they developed proposals for weddings exceptionally. This implied that wedding planners were able to use the statement of work developed during preliminary meetings with clients to determine the elements required to deliver the event. Wedding planning firms developed and used standardized templates which captured the tasks that needed to be performed for each of the elements. The statement of work from the client should inform the development of the WBS for the event which identifies and groups’ tasks that need to be performed in order to deliver the cited elements of the event (OToole & Mikolaitis, 2002). Notably, the use of wedding planning templates can ensure that all elements of the event are covered. However, heavy reliance on templates can in the long run stifle creativity which is an essential part of special events.

4.9 Budget
The study also revealed that majority of the firms prepared budgets exceptionally (95.6%). Firstly, this implied that planners were well acquainted with how to develop, categorize and track changes in expense categories, and handle contingencies and unexpected expenses. The high level of proficiency can be attributed to exceptional performance of preceding tasks particularly proposal development which informed the development of expense categories such as décor, entertainment, lighting, tenting and temporary shelter and catering among others. The contents of the proposal developed in the design phase ease the allocation of funds to each aspect of the wedding (Bouchard, 2003). Moreover, the use of standardized templates developed over time may be able to guide the planner in ensuring that an adequate percentage of the budget is allocated to each aspect of the wedding (Nixon, 2007). Alternatively, the use of software packages enabled planners to track changes in expense categories while the planning process progressed.

4.10 Program development
The high level of expertise in program development (95%) implied that planners were able to assign responsibilities to teams and individuals and put in place action plans that prioritized and scheduled activities to be held prior to the wedding, on the day of the wedding and after the event. The high level of expertise in program development was also attributed to exceptional performance of preceding tasks particularly proposal development which indicated key elements needed to deliver the event in the WBS. The use of project management tools such as the WBS inform the development of an operational events program (Bodwin, Allen, Harris, McDonnell, & O'Toole, 2012). The operational events program lists the activities to be performed by the event
planner and his team in the form of a Gantt chart which is also another project management tool. Therefore, it followed that preparation of the program of events which is distributed to people attending the wedding was derived easily from the operational program. Once more, the use of standardized templates whether in soft copy or hard copy ensure that the details of the program are captured accurately (Riley, 2008; DeLaubenfels et al., 2010).

4.11 Site comparison and selection
Site comparison and selection for weddings were also ranked highly as tasks that were performed particularly well by majority (80% and 88.9% respectively) of wedding planners. This implied that wedding planners were familiar with a range of venues that differed in location, cost of using facilities and size. Certainly, a large percentage of event venues in the city utilized various platforms to showcase what their facilities had to offer. Information on space dimensions, payments required and additional facilities available in a range of venues was accessible from the venue management’s website and from adequate representation at bridal fairs. Additionally contact information on a range of venues was available from telephone directories and could be used for further inquiries regarding dates when the venue was available, policies on caterers, security, refunds and cancellations.

Large cities offer a variety of venues to host events (Veres, Clark, & Golbourne, 2008). These include ballrooms in hotels, mansions in the suburbs, historic buildings, private members clubs, art galleries and gardens (DeLaubenfels et al., 2010). These venues differ in size, style and ambiance (Viau, 2011) and offer additional products and services related to aspects of the wedding such as sound, catering and security (Bywater, 2007). With these four factors in mind and the availability of information on venue offerings, wedding planners could easily advice couples on the venue best suited for the wedding.

4.12 Time management
The findings also indicated that majority of wedding planners were able to allocate enough time for pre-event client meetings, site inspections and vendor meetings (87%, 91% and 91% respectively). This implied that planners were able to accurately prepare and adhere to time plans therefore got tasks such as guest list preparation and finalization, site comparison and selection, vendor vetting, selection and payment done within the set time frame. Certainly the use of checklists indicating the time and assigning responsibilities largely assisted in management of time in wedding planning. The use of checklists ensures that all tasks are performed in good time for the event to be a success (McKenzie & Davies, 2010). Markedly, the timeliness of the wedding planner in meeting these deadlines could determine whether the preferred vendor or venue for the event is secured.

4.13 Negotiation of vendor contracts
Majority of wedding planners (81.9%) were also able to negotiate vendor contracts readily on the clients’ behalf. This implied that there was a cordial working relationship between members of the wedding industry supply chain. This relationship may have been enhanced when a planner recommended a client to the vendor or in the event that the vendor gives the planner a commission for channelling clients in their direction. A pleasant business relationship is beneficial to both the planner and the vendor (DeLaubenfels, Weber, & Bamberg, 2010). Arguably, poor relationships within the supply chain could result in event failure.

4.14 Coordination of human resources, logistics and integration among participants
Though more than half of wedding planners showed above average performance in coordination of human resources and logistics and integration among participants (73.9% and 59% respectively) the remaining percentage struggled with these tasks. This implied that the wedding planner and his/her team likely faced challenges on the day. Given that multiple tasks are carried out simultaneously on the day of the event, foresight in the assignment of tasks and responsibilities was paramount. Tasks on the day of the event may individually be coherent when documented however, the tasks become unduly complex when the need to be managed together within a fixed time frame as
the event proceeds (McKenzie & Davies, 2010). This indicates the need for struggling planners to have a wider skill set to facilitate coordination (Allen et al., 2008). Wedding planners therefore need to revamp their skills in communication, stress management, leadership, conflict resolution and multitasking (Goldblatt, 2005).

4.15 Evaluation
Tasks associated with evaluation namely monitoring of standards and debriefing of staff and clients presented challenges for majority (60.3% and 95.6% respectively) of wedding planners and who consequently recorded a below average performance. This implied that wedding planners are not able to obtain feedback on tasks carried out successfully or poorly, stay abreast by identifying trends and needs of the target market. These firms have poor mechanisms used to obtain feedback from key stakeholders namely: the client, guests, vendors and staff.

First and foremost, obtaining feedback from clients and guests was challenging given that weddings took place within a fixed time frame and it was difficult to access them for post event evaluation. In a study on event stakeholder management in rural events time for a thorough consultation was usually limited (Reid, 2011). Moreover, it is unethical to carry out evaluations on these two stakeholders during the event they are in the process of participating in (Daniels & Loveless, 2007).

Secondly, obtaining feedback from staff was also challenging given that majority of staff who execute weddings are temporary staff. These employees show low commitment to improvement of business processes given that they are only in the establishment for a short time (Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003). Therefore getting them to participate in an evaluation process to monitor standards and improve task performance is highly unlikely.

4.16 Variables influencing performance outcomes
The variables influencing performance outcomes were represented in Figure 2 and discussed individually under the following subtopics: demand for products and services, availability of staff, equipment, facilities, materials in the correct quality and quantity to satisfy demand, reliability of suppliers in responding to orders, cash flow to sustain the operation, availability of information to improve business performance, staff skills to carry out set tasks and firms rules and regulations.

![Variables influencing performance outcomes](image-url)
4.17 Information to improve business performance
The findings of the study indicated that majority (69.6%) of wedding planning firms lacked adequate information to improve business performance. This suggested that decisions regarding productivity, market access and strategic planning were usually poorly informed and could result in business failure. Respondents indicated that they mainly obtained information from customers, competitors, business associates, print and broadcast media and electronic sources. However competitors were unwilling to share information on best practices as they felt they would be disclosing their secrets to competitiveness. Furthermore, planners were unable to evaluate the outcomes of the event with clients and guests and consequently had difficulties in determining whether clients’ expectations had been met. Subsequently, continuous improvement was a challenge.

A study on SMEs in neighbouring Uganda revealed a consistency in lack of information in SMEs across all sectors which was consistent with previous findings on information constraints plaguing a large percentage of businesses in developing countries (Okello, Minishi, Cloete, & Ikoja, 2008). In addition Okello-Obura et al. (2008) noted that information was difficult to access given that there were few sources, information was limited in scope, cumbersome to access and was available in a non-integrated manner. Wedding planners also indicated that the absence of a formal industry association for wedding planners and suppliers has contributed to the current vacuum in information. The absence of this formal industrial association has the potential to hamper market development and strategic planning and can negatively influence growth and survival of wedding planning firms (Bowen et al., 2009).

4.18 Cash flow to sustain operation
Secondly, 30.4% of wedding planning firms attributed challenges in wedding planning to lack of cash flow. This finding implied that money flowing into the business from sales revenue or financers was insufficient to cover purchases and operating expenses. The interviews revealed that tension existed between planners and clients when it came to payment for services. As one wedding planner stated: “When you work with a couple for six to twelve months on an event that is as personal as a wedding, a relationship other than the business kind is created. The planner therefore believes the client is operating in good faith when he asks for an extension on payments.” In most cases planners stated that clients prioritized tangible products higher than they did intangible ones. Consequently, most of couples preferred to pay for intangibles such as planning services after the event once the outcomes of service offerings were experienced. The financial tension was further aggravated by the reluctance of couples to meet up with the planner after the events conclusion. Consequently, wedding planners were unable to secure balances due to them as a result of unavailability or inaccessibility to clients after the event.

4.19 Reliability of suppliers in responding to orders
Despite the symbiotic relationship between wedding planners and suppliers 26.1% respondents indicated that they had problems with supplier reliability. This implied that wedding planners could not guarantee consistency and quality services from suppliers. The interviews revealed that planners occasionally had to deal with suppliers sourced for independently by the client or a wedding committee. One planner observed:

*Some of our clients independently source for suppliers on the recommendation of a friend or relative. Unfortunately the output of these suppliers is unpredictable and we cannot guarantee our client the best.*

This statement revealed the frustration for the wedding planner when he or she was not involved in merging specification of tasks and expected output from suppliers with the clients’ goals, needs and expectations. Given that the output of the event is dependent on cohesiveness of all planning aspects (Daniels & Loveless, 2007) the outcome of the event can be compromised when all parties in the planning

process are not actively involved in laying out terms for product and service provision by suppliers. Notably when wedding planners have not worked with a supplier before, it is difficult to ascertain whether their internal constraints will present challenges in product or service provision for the wedding the planner is organizing. In order to counteract uncertainty when dealing with suppliers an inquiry into supplier reliability based on the output they gave past clients in their database (DeLaubenfels, Weber, & Bamberg, 2010).

4.20 Availability of facilities to satisfy demand
The findings of the study indicated that 22.7% of wedding planners felt that facilities that could host weddings are largely unavailable. This implied that the venues were in short supply in relation to the demand that existed for them. Respondents indicated that couples were still fixated on hosting weddings at churches, schools, hotels and recreational gardens. Unfortunately, the number of these facilities has not been increasing in response to demand for them. This finding was in contrast to the assertion by the Kenya Tourism Guide (1999) that tourist facilities have been increasing at 4% annually in order to meet demand.

Wedding planners need access to a range of destinations that can cater to individual couples wedding themes for both the wedding ceremony and reception (Bain, Gawne, & Radford, 2011). Therefore it fell on planners to recommend alternative venues to host weddings such as country clubs and members clubs. Challenges in accessing facilities such as country clubs and members clubs were attributed to mandatory requirements by venue operators that facilities can be used by members only (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Furthermore, some facilities only allow couples to use their venues for events when they pay for additional packages that include catering services and sound (Bouchard, 2003). This limited the appeal of some venues to couples who intend to customize their event.

4.21 Demand for products and services
Additionally, 21.7% wedding planning firms had challenges related to attracting demand for services. This implied that firms were unable to consistently attract the clients and generate revenue throughout the financial year. With regard to attracting clients, respondent firms indicated that Kenyans perceived their services as a luxury that could only be afforded by a few. This finding concurred with statistics from UKAWP in 2011, where only 11% of brides sampled indicated that they would use a wedding planner while 33.89% of brides felt that planners were expensive (Gould, 2011).

In reality, couples did not understand the benefits of hiring a wedding planner such as: saving time (spent on sourcing for quotations, vetting and selection of vendors), saving money (planners can negotiate discounts and enforce budget restrictions set by the couple), creating schedules and handling crises (Daniels & Loveless, 2007). Unless the benefits of contracting a wedding planner are appreciated by couples, the demand for their services will continue to remain low. This assertion is in stark contrast to Pfister and Tierney (2009) affirmation that augmented service features can stimulate demand.

Seasonality of demand was another market constraint to wedding planning. This implied that the flow of business and financial earnings was lopsided. Planners indicated that couples mainly got married in the months of December and August when family and friends were available. Furthermore, weddings took place mainly on Saturday and Sunday and rarely on weekdays. This confirmed Shone and Parry’s (2004) assertion that special events are usually organized when people are available to offer mutual support and reinforce social norms. Similarly seasonality of demand was also experienced in the United States where June (10.8%) was the most popular month for weddings followed by August (10.2%), May (9.8%), September (9.6%) and October (9.4%). Seasonality challenges are synonymous to businesses in the tourism industry that deal with fluctuations in demand (Mok, Sparks, & Kadampully, 2009).

4.22 Availability of staffs to satisfy demand
Markedly, 95.7% of respondents indicated that their firms had access to an adequate number of staff for events. This implied that the labour
market was highly saturated and provided requisite manpower during both peak and trough wedding seasons. According to KIPPRA though Kenya has a rapidly growing labour force, few employment opportunities exist and particularly for the youth (KIPPRA, 2009). Consequently wedding planning firms fill the void by creating short term employment opportunities for youth in the labour market. Short term employment opportunities were viable from events given that the smaller events such as weddings are short lived (Bodwin, Allen, Harris, McDonnell, & O'Toole, 2012). A study in Australia revealed that the events industry in Australia at the time was a viable creator of employment opportunities (Lockstone, Junek, & Mair, 2008).

4.23 Material constraints
The findings of the study indicated 82.6% and 91.3% of wedding planners were able to access equipment and materials in the correct quality and quantity respectively. Notably, the remaining 17.4% and 8.7% of respondents who were unable to access equipment and materials respectively were likely to face challenges in event execution which may result in business failure. This finding implied that planners could orchestrate events of different themes due to the availability of a wide range of materials. Consequently, customization of events to suit the couple’s demands was easy to realize. For firms that faced material constraints, the planners acknowledged that materials were available but the firm lacked sufficient cash flow to obtain them. Similarly, lack of resources due to unavailability or unaffordability has an adverse effect on business growth (Nissanke & Aryeetey, 1998).

4.24 Firm rules, regulations and policies
Majority of the respondents (95.7%) indicated that the firms’ policies, rules and regulations were suitable which implied that current rules, regulations, guidelines and procedures that

wedding planning firms employed facilitated the achievement of organizational goals. This finding was in stark contrast to TOC which identifies policy constraints as the largest factor that prevents firms from achievement of goals (Rahman, 1988). Policies though difficult to identify were usually the main cause physical constraints that limited operational capability within organizations (Goldratt, 1988).

4.25 Abundant staff skill levels to carry out set tasks
Majority of respondents (91.3%) indicated that their staff possessed skills to perform requisite tasks. This implied that wedding planners and their staff were creative, able to coordinate and consolidate resources, work in an ambiguous environment and solve problems because they had strong management and organizational skills. The possession of multiple skills is essential to planning successful weddings (Peragine, 2008). Respondents indicated that they recruited operative staff that had prior experience with event execution. Furthermore, managerial staff was required to have obtained vocational training from an accredited programs such as Certified Wedding Specialist. Evidently staff skill sets were assessed by wedding planning firms during the staff recruitment stage.

4.26 Impact of constraints on the wedding planning process
The variables influencing performance outcomes of the wedding planning process were then entered into regression analysis to determine the relative impact on the overall wedding planning process (dependent variable). Stepwise multiple regression was selected because it took into account the exploratory power of more than one independent variable simultaneously. The F statistic for the regression model was 54.814 with a p value of .000.
As it can be seen, constraints proposed by TOC explained 94.7 per cent of variance in the overall wedding planning process. Significant factors in the model were identified in descending order as: financial ($\beta=.445$; $p=.000$), resource constraints ($\beta=.419$; $p=.000$), competence ($\beta=.247$; $p=.002$), supplier ($\beta=.238$; $p=.001$), material constraints ($\beta=.231$; $p=.000$) and policy constraints ($\beta=.170$; $p=.027$). The higher the $\beta$ coefficient the larger the impact the constraint had on wedding planning. Consequently we reject the null hypothesis given that several constraints had a significant impact on the wedding planning process. This finding concurred with TOC which postulates that only a few factors prevent a system from achieving its goals (Boyd & Gupta, 2004). Notably 5.3 percent of the variance in the wedding planning process can be explained by other factors, thus prompting the need for further research. Financial constraints ($\beta=.445$; $p=.000$) accounted for the largest percentage of variance in the overall wedding planning process. Financial constraints are caused by lack of sufficient funds to cover purchases and operating expenses. This shortage can have adverse effects on the first three stages of the wedding planning process namely research, design and planning. The tasks carried out during these stages such as program preparation, site comparison and selection as well as securing vendors and other service providers require a significant capital outlay. Consequently, setting timelines for raising finances to meet costs stipulated in the budget should be followed strictly both by the client and the event planner (Nixon, 2007).

Secondly, resource constraints ($\beta=.419$; $p=.000$) also contributed to variance in the overall wedding planning process. Resource constraints are caused by lack of staff, equipment or facilities to satisfy demand due to cost constrains or unavailability. Firstly, permanent and additional temporary staff members are required during the planning and execution phases of the wedding organisation process. Human resources are required to perform multiple tasks that are entwined and at times need to be performed concurrently. Principally, it is the performance of these tasks brings the event to life as represented in the event proposal (McKenzie & Davies, 2010, p. 788). Additionally, cost constrains or shortage of equipment for specific elements cited in the event proposal and availability of facilities to prepare for and host the event can influence interpretation and execution of the event theme developed during the design phase. For this reason, planners and couples should holistically evaluate shortlisted venues and packages offered to determine whether these fit the event proposal requirements (Bywater, 2007).

Thirdly, competence constraints ($\beta=.247$; $p=.002$) accounted for the third largest percentage of variance in the overall wedding planning process. Competence constraints occur when the wedding planning firm has limited skills to perform tasks. The skills gap affects every facet of the wedding organisation process from research to evaluation. Wedding planners should have a skill set that includes creativity, calculated risk taking, tolerance of ambiguity, problem solving and strong managerial and organisational skills (Peragine, 2008).
Supplier constraints ($\beta=.238; \ p=.001$) also accounted for the fourth largest percentage of variance in the wedding planning process. Supplier constraints occur when the vendors and service providers are unreliable in responding to orders. These inconsistencies hinder wedding planners from guaranteeing quality products and services to their clients. Ultimately, the execution of tasks on the day of the wedding and the attainment of goals set for the wedding at the beginning of the event planning process may be compromised. Consequently, wedding planners are encouraged to maintain a list of vendors and service providers who are reputable and can support varied themes (Moran, 2009).

Material constraints ($\beta=.231; \ p=.000$) also contributed significantly to the variance in the wedding organisation process. Material constraints occur when the quality and quantity of materials needed to execute a wedding are unattainable. Failure to get materials that meet the specifications set out during the wedding design and planning stages can result in challenges in actualisation of the wedding theme and specific tasks on the day of the event given that not all elements of the event can be realised in the manner in which they were stated in the wedding planners’ proposal. Accordingly, the material shortages compromise the ability of SMEs to meet set goals (Smith & Smith, 2007).

Lastly, policy constraints ($\beta=.170; \ p=.027$) accounted for the smallest percentage of variance in wedding planning. Policies constraints occur when the rules, regulations and guidelines for procedures within an organisation inhibit the attainment of the event and organisational goals. Implicitly, firms needed to develop policies rules and regulations for administration, design, marketing, operations and risk management domains identified in the EMBOK model. This will ensure that tasks carried out within the domains and phases facet are supported by an efficient framework.

Essentially, policies and procedures inform the processes facet of the EMBOK model which enable event planners to keep up with the evolving nature of events by facilitating assessment, selection, monitoring, communication and documentation of tasks (Silvers, Bodwin, O’Toole, & Nelson, 2006). According to TOC the absence of this framework can result in physical constraints that limit operational capability within firms (Rahuman, 1998; Goldratt, 1988).

4.27 Constraint management methodologies

The causes of action adopted by wedding planners to counteract the impact of constraints on the event planning process were organised and discussed under the following subtopics: access to information to improve business performance, financial constraint management, supplier constraint management, market demand, staff competencies constraint management, resource constraint management and policy formulation.

4.28 Access to information to improve business performance

Wedding planners indicated that they accessed information to improve business performance mainly from the internet. This implied that wedding planners were able to access information on trends and industry practices from practitioners all over the world. The internet is an important source of information that can inform new product development for existing and new markets (Walters & Lancater, 1999). The internet has been used for researching information in 80 companies located in six European countries (Dutta & Evrard, 1999).

In addition firms carried out market research when funding was available with the aim of identifying current trends in wedding planning. This finding implied that wedding planning firms were unable to consistently carry out research and gather information to improve performance. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, partnerships between small firms can overcome this challenge and facilitate knowledge sharing (OECD, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012).

4.29 Financial constraint management

The study revealed several ways in which wedding planners managed financial constraints. Firstly, firms took bank overdrafts and used personal savings to keep the business afloat during the low seasons. Secondly, wedding
planners supplemented their income by organizing additional events such as corporate events, meetings and conventions. This implied that wedding planning firms acquired additional financial resources to enhance the constraints capacity given that financial constraints were attributed to insufficient cash flowing into the business during low seasons. This constraint management methodology was a replica of step four of the TOC model that requires the constraint capacity to be elevated in order for a system to reach its set goal (Dettmer, 1997). In this case, for the event to have a successful outcome, wedding planning firms need to have sufficient cash flow.

4.30 Supplier constraint management
In order to overcome supplier constraints, wedding planners used two approaches. Firstly, planners kept a list of suppliers with whom they had worked with before. These suppliers had a previous relationship and good rapport with the planners. Moreover, they had a track record and the planner therefore felt confident in recommending them to the couple. Suppliers should be vetted by planners on the basis of references, years of experience and professionalism (Monroe, 2006).

Secondly, the planners ensured that contracts between the supplier and the couple were drawn up and the parameters for delivery set. This indicated that wedding planning firms instituted a policy on supplier management to safeguard the firm and couple from delivery problems with suppliers. This constraint management mechanism also follows the TOC model which requires that organizations policies and procedures regarding constraints be changed or implemented to fully support the strategy behind constraint alleviation (Goldratt, 1988).

4.31 Market demand
The interviews revealed the approaches currently employed by wedding planners to overcome market constraints were related to demand and seasonality of business. In order to increase demand for their services, planners opted to market themselves aggressively at local bridal fairs and exhibitions such as the bi-annual Samantha Bridal Fair. The aim of participating in these fairs and exhibitions was to showcase service offerings which would stimulate demand. The demand for augmented products and services can be stimulated by increasing awareness on product or service features (Pfister & Tierney, 2009). However wedding planners who participated in these fairs and exhibitions still indicated that despite increasing their presence at these fairs, demand for planners is still relatively low.

In addition to fairs and exhibitions, planners also generated articles and features in local bridal magazines targeting couples who were yet to take their nuptials such as The Eve Bridal Magazine and The Samantha Bridal Magazine. Also firms attempted to increase their presence online through websites, pages in social networking sites and blogs. In the United States over 80% of couples do their weddings research online and over 7.5 million bridal magazines are purchased each year (NMOA, 1999). When these two media are combined, wedding planners are likely to reach a wide audience.

With regard to seasonality of demand, wedding planners advised clients to select off-peak seasons citing favourable discounts from suppliers and availability of materials during those periods. As a result planners noted an increase in the number of weddings in Nairobi being held on Fridays and during the month of February. It therefore holds that there is enhanced value for money experienced by people who opt for tourism experiences during low seasons (Baum & Lundtorp, 2001). For instance in the United States, couples could save as much as 10-20 percent when they held weddings during off peak season (November 1 and April 30)(Harrison, 2008).

4.32 Staff competencies constraint management
The study revealed that constraints related to staff competencies were overcome by having a standard staff list which consisted of employees who could be trained prior to the event. Moreover, wedding planners evaluated the performance of staff after every wedding to determine who was eligible to participate in the next event. This finding implied that though firms relied heavily on external employment models, wedding planners still remained
committed to building skills for competitive advantage regardless of whether staff were employed on a temporary or permanent basis. Notably, in some cases, firms that employed a large percentage of staff on contract illustrated low commitment towards development of skills (Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003).

4.3.3 Resource constraint management methods
The study revealed that wedding planners attempted to access more facilities, equipment, and staff before competitors when demand was at its peak. Facilities and equipment were usually acquired by lease or on short contracts for staff by making reservations before the peak season begun. With regard to material resources whose supply is usually fixed, wedding planners encouraged couples to host events during off peak seasons when materials such as flowers were readily available. Resource constraint management methods coincided with TOC assertion that all constraints should be utilized to maximum capacity so long as they are available and that all other functions in the business should facilitate the functioning of that constraint (Schragenheim & Dettmer, 2001).

4.3.4 Policy formulation
Respondents indicated that once the cause of failure for a particular event was revealed after monitoring and evaluation, policies were revised in order to ensure all events in the future yielded the desired outcome. Policies that were periodically reviewed and modified helped firms remain dynamic and responsive to changes in the business environment (Agarwal, 2008).

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations
This study revealed that wedding organisation firms exhibited above average performance in wedding planning and were therefore able to meet the clients’ expectations and event goals. Despairingly, failure to evaluate the event upon conclusion was likely to be an impediment to continuous improvement. Performance was further aggravated by inadequate information, insufficient cash flow, unreliability of suppliers in responding to orders, unavailability of facilities to satisfy demand and low demand for products and services. In spite of these challenges, full utilization of existing resources and sourcing for additional finances, alternative suppliers, unconventional event facilities, aggressive promotion and continuous revision of internal policies, wedding organisation firms were able to plan and execute weddings.

Nonetheless, this study recommends the revision of internal policies within wedding planning firms that will focus on the elimination of financial, resource, competence, supplier and material constraints. This follows TOC’s assertion that rules and guidelines for procedures create a framework that can prevent the aforementioned constraints from limiting wedding planners from planning and executing the wedding as per the client’s expectations. Notably, exploring this strategy calls for continuous review and revision of policies where necessary to keep up with changes in the business environment and prevent complacency.

REFERENCES


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