

Leadership Practices and the Performance of Public Organizations in Kenya: A Case of Nyeri County Headquarters

¹Peter N. Thiong'o and ²Prof. David Minja

¹Principal Researcher, Kenyatta University

²Department of Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University

doi:<https://doi.org/10.37745/ijbmr.2013/vol11n63255>

Published July 12 2023

Citation: Thiong'o P.N.and Minja D. (2023) Leadership Practices and the Performance of Public Organizations in Kenya: A Case of Nyeri County Headquarters, *International Journal of Business and Management Review*, Vol.11, No.6, pp.32-55

ABSTRACT: *Despite the central role leadership plays in achieving set objectives for organizations, leadership practices can sometimes be an impediment to achieving those goals and objectives. The study examined influence of leadership practices on performance of public organisations in Kenya, Nyeri County Headquarters. Predictor variables included communication, leadership support, accountability, and delegation. Out of the 159 randomly selected participants, 113 successfully participated, translating into 71% response rate. From the findings, 53%, 76%, 73%, and 64% of the respondents respectively agreed that communication, leadership support, accountability, and delegation influenced performance of public organizations. Inferential statistics showed that communication ($p=0.002<0.05$), leadership support ($p=0.001<0.05$), accountability ($p=0.004<0.05$), and delegation ($p=0.003<0.05$), all significantly influenced organizational performance in the public sector in Kenya. In conclusion, leadership practices generally significantly influenced organizational performance in the public sector. The study recommended good leadership practices in Kenyan public sector through effective HR policies and management structures for better performance.*

KEYWORDS: leadership practices, performance, public organizations, Kenya, Nyeri

INTRODUCTION

Leadership cannot be separated from organization performance, both in private and public sectors. Through leadership, it is the leaders who determine how assignments are allocated to different staffs while at the same time deploying resources to facilitate expected outcomes.

Leadership in government institutions serves an essential part to facilitate government's development agenda are accomplished according to plan. Surya (2015) postulates that effective leadership in government institutions must be visionary and flexible enough to accommodate the interests of employees while at the same time poised for achieving the broader objective of public service delivery.

In Europe, public sector leadership is influenced by changing parameters of civic as well as private resources in governance. Some of the critical aspects of leadership entail corporate cultural orientations, the type of industry, education level of the individuals at the helm of the organization, and competencies of the leaders. Additionally, there are such issues as the style of leadership and the level of engagement with other organizations in the same industry as well as the number of employees at the workplace (Marjanova & Fotov, 2014). These principles of public institutional management cut across different countries, including Kenya. In public service, leadership determines a lot of things and the general service delivery to the public, right from national to local administrative levels. However, despite the central role leadership plays in achieving set objectives for individuals and organizations, the style of leadership can sometimes be an impediment to achieving those goals and objectives.

In South Africa, studies have widely revealed that many cases of government inability to offer services in affective manner are related to poor leadership behaviour. This can be considered in terms of poor training and general lack of mechanisms for upgrading individual skills for those in leadership positions to be able to competently serve the public in different capacities (Breevaart et al, 2014). However, poor service delivery by the government, which may be attributed to ineffective leadership, tends to deny people an opportunity to get their due services from the government (Lankshear et al, 2013). The practice tends to replicate in a number of government organizations, especially in the African context where government policy experts argue that there is institutionalized bureaucracy which always slows things down. Nonetheless, following devolved government functions in a number of African countries today, it remains to be seen whether the trend is likely to change anytime soon.

In Uganda, Awan, Qureshi, & Arif (2012) argue that leadership practices are also viewed as a precursor for good organizational output. In a study by Ahmed (2013) to understand how leadership style influences performance of organizations, it emerged existence of correlation between proper and effective leadership and organizational performance. However, like in many other countries across the globe, there is no ideal public governance model in Uganda due to diverse operational challenges facing public institutions at various levels. Despite the challenges, overall, the public will always demand the best from government institutions, such as delivering of services and response to various needs by the citizenry. Therefore, leadership is often at the center of general organization and delivery of government pledges to the people.

Although devolution in Kenya has largely been hailed as an effective public governance model when it comes to taking services closer to the people, a number of cases have been reported where government officials in various devolved government offices fail to serve the public to the levels of public expectation due to leadership issues (Makori, 2014). Some of the problems are often associated with government bureaucracies that hamper interdepartmental communication, top leadership support, proper coordination, accountability, and delegation among other best practices in proper and effective government offices (Mathew et al, 2016). Despite the government's efforts to reform the public service, a number of public offices may still lack proper leadership support channels for the overall good of public service delivery based on the best leadership practices (GoK, 2016). Such practices end up hurting performance of respective public offices or departments.

Nyeri County Government

The County of Nyeri makes part of the 47 devolved units in the Kenya which were created by the 2010 constitution in order to entrench devolution and bring government services closer to the people. Headquartered in Nyeri Town, and inhabited with a population of close to 760,000 in an area of nearly 2361 km², Nyeri County is situated in the former Central Province. Others include Muranga, Kiambu, Nyandarua, and Kirinyaga counties.

Like a number of other county governments, performance by Nyeri county government significantly depends on, among other factors, leadership style and practices. Generally, government service delivery in Nyeri County, like many others, is said to be hampered by poor interdepartmental communication, ineffective support by senior management, lack of accountability, corruption, inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, manpower issues, and bad policies among others. However, this study will narrow down to leadership practices in the context of communication, leadership support, accountability, and delegation practices.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership is a critical element in effective management of public institutions and resources. However, a number of factors have been associated with ineffective leadership that ends up hurting service delivery to the public. In their study on the role of external factors on public organizational performance in Kenya, Machuki and Aosa (2011) revealed a significant influence of top management leadership on the general performance of those institutions. In focusing on the leadership dynamics and how business institutions were affected due to failure of leadership in South Africa, the findings by Jooste and Fourie (2009) indicated that performance of government and private organizations was dependent on leadership competence and style.

In another study by Miring'u (2011) that dwelt on the relationship between management style and capacity and how government institutions performed in Kenya, it was noted that good leadership enables organizations to be innovative and bring new ideas that propel performance to new heights. At the same time, good corporate leadership inspires junior employees in putting in all their efforts with the singular aim of achieving best outputs for the organization and the staff in general. However, the research by Miring'u (2011) focused on the private sector of business, thereby creating a contextual gap. The current study therefore aimed to understand how leadership practices influenced how and the extent to which public organizations in Kenya performed, with Nyeri County Headquarters serving as the focus of attention of this research.

Objectives of the Study

The study addressed the following specific objectives:

- i. To determine the influence of communication on performance of public organizations in Kenya.
- ii. To examine the effect of leadership support on performance of public organizations in Kenya.
- iii. To understand the influence of accountability on performance of public organizations in Kenya.
- iv. To find out the influence of delegation on performance of public organizations in Kenya.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

- i. What is the influence of communication on performance of public organizations in Kenya?
- ii. What is the effect of leadership support on performance of public organizations in Kenya?
- iii. What is the influence of accountability on performance of public organizations in Kenya?
- iv. What is the influence of delegation on performance of public organizations in Kenya?

Justification and Significance of the Study

Leadership style plays a central role in performance of public organizations in Kenya, including in national and devolved units. Nyeri County makes part of the counties in Kenya that experience leadership problems that often end up hampering the expected flow of services from the government to the people at local units. Therefore, conducting this research was timely as its findings will be important in highlighting key leadership issues influencing performance of public institutions at county level in Kenya and specifically at Nyeri County Government Headquarters. The study will also provide guidelines on the most effective leadership practices that public organizations in Kenya can adopt in order to improve their performance. The findings will also be useful for policymakers in terms of streamlining leadership policies and practices for

better public service delivery to Kenyans in general. Additionally, this may be a reference material for future empirical inquiry into the subject of corporate governance in Kenya and beyond.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The research was about the relationship between leadership practices and performance of public institutions in Nyeri county headquarters. It involved all the management employees who included heads in the County Government departments at Nyeri County Headquarters. The study took two years to complete.

The study faced some limitations, which in one way or the other derailed its timely completion. Some of the respondents were reluctant to talk about weaknesses that existed in their leadership structures lest they were victimized by the management. To address these fears, the researcher confirmed to them that the research would only be used for academic purposes, and this gave them the assurance and confidence to freely participate in the research. High level of confidence was also assured by avoiding personal details anywhere as the interviews were being administered to the research participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned and guided by the strategic leadership model, managerial leadership theory, and performance monitoring theory.

Strategic Leadership Theory

This theoretical model was initiated by Hambrick and Mason (1984). The theory is instrumental in giving prescription on how the top leadership in an organization can impact performance of the organization in a general sense. According to Hambrick and Pettigrew (2001), unlike leadership theory, strategic leadership theory specifically mirrors individuals at the top management of an organization. In this sense, the top leadership is viewed as instrumental in influencing strategic processes of an organization (Yukli, 2006). In the context of this study, policies which usually guide management processes in government institutions are a product of the senior management. Strategic leadership in this sense is imperative in shaping direction organizations should take as top management resolves conflicts and brings stability to the organization in the short and long term.

Through strategic leadership, an individual leading a team is able to navigate through the daily challenges where sometimes difficult decisions have to be made irrespective of the feelings or fears from some of the team members. According to Rowe (2011), efficient leadership can

influence others through ingenuity by ensuring that conflicts at the work place are minimized as much as possible. For instance, given the nature of government offices where employees are not driven by profits, some individuals could decide to be lax in their duties unless they are pushed or constantly being reminded of their responsibilities.

Managerial Leadership Theory

The theoretic perspective has its origin in 1964 when it was initiated by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton. It is founded on human behavioural philosophy that individuals are trained to be leaders and that the best leaders must have been properly trained. Furthermore, this theoretical model focuses on dimensions of social change, such as concern for employees by the leader, and organizational outputs (Bhatia, 2009). Regarding a leader's concern for his/her team; the theory argues that the leader should be conscious of the needs and interests of the people he/she is leading since it is such concern that will motivate them to effectively strive to achieve the overall organizational vision and mission.

Concerning the organizational productivity or work outcomes, the theory envisions a situation where the manager should always be driven by the desire for his or her team to excel in all that they do for the sake of the organization. The best results cannot however be achieved unless there is organizational efficiency which should be viewed in terms of skillful and motivated employees and effective structures for production or delivery of responsibilities by the team (Bhatia, 2009). Kokemuller and Media (2013) observes that managers should be ready to adopt different leadership styles as circumstances may dictate so as to achieve their best outcomes. In this sense, there may be various leadership styles that a manager can adopt to realize desirable results. Regardless of the leadership style a manager or leader may adopt, the theory observes that satisfaction of the subordinates must be at the center of consideration for any effective manager. The ultimate end should be improved overall organizational performance as each of the employees works hard as a way of reciprocating the management's good deeds to him/her.

Performance Monitoring Theory

There are different important aspects of leadership practices and public service delivery (Hudson, Smart, & Bourne, 2001). In this sense, managers are often faced with how to identify and measure their performance milestones. There are also the elements of employee performance, quality of service and customer satisfaction. According to Greer, Youngblood and Gray (1999), organizations should always strive to adopt a balanced scorecard approach when measuring effectiveness of the leadership outcomes. At the same time, Hudson et al (2001) pointed out that there are various important aspects of organizational performance which include quality, time, flexibility, finance, human resources, and customer satisfaction. Based on this current study, this theory contextualized the element of accountability as an important factor of leadership and performance when it comes to public service delivery.

Empirical Review

Communication and Performance in Government Organizations

Effective communication is very critical in the running of corporates in all business spheres. In the context of hierarchical arrangement in an organization, it is important for the information to flawlessly trickle from the top management to the lower offices in order to create the right environment for productivity and efficiency (Morren, 2018). According to Hitmaker and Hassan (2015), in a working environment where employees work in synergy as a result of effective communication, the outcome is likely to be commendable. However, this previous study was conducted in a different environment more than 6 years ago. Furthermore, managers use effective communication channels to have their juniors perform important basic duties in an organization. Such functions include planning, organizing, and controlling which require managers to clearly convey their messages and intentions so that their subordinates can follow them. The current study will consider communication as a function of leadership within the context of county government.

Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) carried out research related to the role of messaging dynamics on performance of private businesses in Nigeria and established that the style of leadership significantly determined the kind of outcome to expect. Senior staffs got interviewed from a number of reputable organizations in the private sector to share different experiences. The findings revealed that it was important for company managers to always clearly communicate so that the message can be effectively passed to their juniors for action. However, without a clear objective, it would be very difficult for the management to pass the message to the intended target. Kibe (2014) undertook research on how communication dynamics influenced performance of Kenya Ports Authority as a government organization. Specifically, the research examined four sub-variables of communication approaches namely, organizational structure, fair treatment of junior employees, collective efforts, and the structural communication strategies. The study concluded that all public organizations must endeavour to strengthen their communication strategies in order to encourage open door policy where information freely flows from one administrative level of the organization to the next. In order to further enhance communication structures at organizational level, internal communication departments must be autonomous in their operations as they interdepend with other key sections in the organization. According to Morren (2018), there are different aspects of communication that are very important for any manager. These include workplace communication statistics, types of communication, flow of information, and improving communication. Regarding workplace communication statistics, Morren (2018) argues that the aspect of communication in an organization should be viewed beyond information flow among employees to include customers. Effective communication within and outside the organization can increase customer satisfaction thereby enhancing the general image of the organization. On the contrary, vague and confusing information or instructions to junior employees from their seniors can often easily lead to wrong

actions by the juniors, which could end up curtailing the performance of different organizations in government and the private sectors. Yet, according to Bennis (2009), lack of clear definition of the concept of leadership makes it difficult to uniformly apply the concept in determining organizational performance. In light of this argument, the current study became important in highlighting dynamics of the current public governance model of devolved governments in Kenya.

Leadership Support and Performance in Government Organizations

Studies have proven that leadership directly influences success or failure of institutions both in the private and public sectors (Mavin, Gandy & Williams, 2017). Leaders or managers directly determine work values, culture, change direction, and employee motivation among other aspects which are critical. This implies that it is the prerogative of the leader or manager to shape the institutional structures and give directions on how to effectively execute the visions of an organization. Despite the bureaucracies in government institutions such as at national government level, leadership plays an instrumental role in policy direction as well as day to day practices in public service delivery (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2016).

In Abuja Nigeria, Ibrahim & Daniel (2019) used mixed method approach to reveal that managers' leadership style significantly influenced organizational performance. Furthermore, leaders played a critical role in motivation of the staffs which eventually determined the extent of their willingness to effectively perform in their duties. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) further established that participatory leadership approach enhanced the aspect of delegation which further improved staff performance. Leadership style also influenced the direction of the employees' efforts at corporate and personal levels. The study concluded that organizations should strive to have the right individuals at leadership positions in order to effectively excel in organizational goals. Hatmaker and Hassan (2014) surveyed staff and management of a big company to understand how managerial styles affected outputs of public institutions. It was revealed that when there is visionary and focused control at the top of an organization, employees perform better. The researchers recommended that effective public management requires proactive managers who are able to put into consideration the needs of their employees as they make key decisions in an organization.

Regarding constituency approach, Ali et al (2010) argue that organizations are mostly considered as effectively performing when majority of the stakeholders appears to have such views. That means that organizational performance is also a function of public opinion, especially when considered in the context of customer satisfaction. However, this argument could be debatable since it is not possible to always get the views of all stakeholders of an organization in order to analyze their level of satisfaction about how the institution is serving its intended service recipients. By addressing the aspect of accountability of the leadership as a factor of

organizational performance, the current study stands a better chance of highlighting critical determining leadership factors of organizational performance.

Accountability and Performance in Government Organizations

Accountability promotes organizational performance and delivery of service especially in the public sector. Studies indicate that accountability enhances employee commitment to work and engenders a high sense of creativity and innovation (Laegreid, 2014). Empirical evidence further shows that accountability in organizational operations increases morale and satisfaction levels among the workforce hence translating into better outcomes for the entire organization (Vermeeren, Kuipers & Steijn, 2014). Vermeeren et al (2014) define accountability as the fundamental precondition for prevention of misuse of power and privileges by those at the helm of the organization. It makes leaders to be answerable to their actions or omissions such that their privileged positions can instead be directed towards enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness in the organizations they work for.

In the Kenyan context, the devolved government units are often being accused of corruption, mismanagement of resources and lack of transparency and accountability among top government officials (Machuki and Aosa, 2011). Yet at the same time, there is very high public expectation from the county governments, especially given the main objective of devolution where services are supposed to be brought closer to the people (Yang, 2012). Therefore, the current study was critical in addressing crucial leadership practices that are likely to influence performance of a public organization with specific reference to Nyeri County Headquarters. Leadership development practices in public organizations and government cannot be overemphasized when it comes to determining the outcome of the organizations (Liao, 2010). Yet, often organizational culture in some government offices tend to hamper performance by public servants hence derailing the government's overarching objective of serving its citizens in a fair, equitable and effective manner (Mathew et al, 2016).

In another study by Halim and Agustiawan (2019) regarding accountability in organizations in Indonesia, it emerged that performance, financial, hierarchical, professional, and legal accountability were the common constituents of accountability that determined public sector organizations. Using a mixed method approach and conducted specifically in Yogyakarta region of Indonesia where 114 respondents were interviewed using a questionnaire, the study further noted that hierarchical and professional accountability did not matter as much as the rest of the categories of accountability in as far as their influence on organizational performance was concerned. However, although accountability in general significantly influenced performance of public organizations, the study by Halim and Agustiawan (2019) was conducted in a different study environment, thereby calling for an update on this subject in a different study context.

Similarly, Choi and Chun (2020) conducted a study where it focused on the relationship between many aspects of accountability in a private company in Korea. The outcome of the research indicated that generally higher accountability generates more desirable outcomes for government institutions. More specifically, legal and hierarchical accountability present better performance especially when it comes to student satisfaction. The study concluded that accountability is an important element for organizational performance in public institutions. However, different aspects of accountability have different effects on the performance. Yet, the study by Choi and Chun (2020) was done in a different context from the current study which will be imperative for highlighting the study subject in the Kenya's situation.

Delegation and Performance in Government Organizations

Delegation is the act of managers sharing some of their responsibilities and authority with their immediate juniors. This process motivates the subordinates to develop a greater sense of belonging and appreciation by their bosses hence boosting their self-esteem and subsequently their performance at the workplace (Inuwa, 2016). To the managers, delegation gives them an opportunity to focus on higher-level tasks while at the same time allowing those delegated to, to learn new skills. Empirical evidence shows that delegation is more practical where the leader or manager has created trust and improved communication between workers (Olesia, Namusonge and Iravo, 2013). Ultimately, delegation improves productivity, efficiency, and time management by all employees who are involved. However, different dynamics and circumstances determine effect of delegation in an organization. According to Makori (2014), like many other countries, in Kenya several government and private organizations have been linked to corruption and mismanagement, thereby leading to poor performance. Yet, despite the general consensus that devolution has brought government services closer to the people, there have been numerous complaints regarding favouritism and corruption when it comes to offering various services to the members of the public.

Notably, despite devolved government units which were intended to be aligned with the essential needs of the citizens, there are still doubts if the strategy is achieving its intended propose in terms of effective management of public institutions. Despite the widespread celebration of devolution in Kenya which has been found to have remarkable impact on government's performance related to services to people, numerous complaints are still raised from various public quarters with regards to the manner in which various social or interest groups of members of the public are served. In this respect, government organizations' leadership may become a subject of debate since the top management is always expected to provide a lead on things that are organized and managed in as far as better performance outcome is concerned (Murad & Gill, 2016).

Alhosani et al (2018) conducted a research on factors affecting delegation authority toward employee performance in public organizations in Dubai and established that employees constitute a very important component of every organization. Employee satisfaction was therefore critical in helping to determine or achieve the goals and objectives of a public organization. The study also revealed that participatory approach through delegation of duties enabled recognition of staff in senior leadership as the junior employees were motivated to work harder for the overall improved performance of their employer. Through delegation, the organization's senior management is able to build trust among the employees, enhance their commitment to work, erase likely communication barriers, and help the staff to improve their time management skills. The end result of delegation is improved output for the entire organization.

Kuria et al (2016) noted that employee delegation and consultation are very important in promoting organizational commitment, job satisfaction by employees, and work output at individual level. This in turn helped to boost the entire team's morale to perform better, which finally led to generally improved organizational performance. On the contrary, absence of delegation and consultation among employees on important decisions in an organization was responsible for employee dissatisfaction which is usually the cause of such things as strikes thereby negatively affecting performance for the entire organization. The authors concluded that all government organizations must strive to encourage delegation and consultation in their operations if they are keen on boosting their outputs. The researchers finally recommended clear delegation policy guidelines and structures as well as improved workplace in order to avoid situations where duties are only delegated to the people closest to senior managers.

Ugoani (2020) did research related to effective delegation and how this impacted organizational outputs of staffs of Nigerian banks. Exploratory design was employed to involve 90 respondents from whom information was gathered. It was noted that effective delegation of duties greatly helped employees to improve their output. It further emerged that delegation gives employees a sense of autonomy and serves as a mark for trust by the senior management on the person who has been entrusted with the new responsibility. Delegation also serves as an avenue for holding junior employees accountable for bigger responsibilities thereby forcing them to work hard in order not to disappoint their immediate bosses. In the process, the entire leadership in an organization becomes more collaborative while at the same time giving employees in comparatively smaller positions an opportunity to be empowered, motivated, and better performers.

Conceptual Framework

The independent variables of the study included communication, leadership support, accountability, and delegation. The conceptual framework below illustrates a theoretical link

existing amongst predictor variables and outcome of the study. In this sense, existing government policies and code of conduct for civil service would determine how or the extent to which communication, leadership support, accountability, and delegation as leadership practices can be exercised to influence performance of public institutions in Kenya. Moderating variables included government policies and code of conduct for public officers, which determine the relationship between variables.

Independent Variables

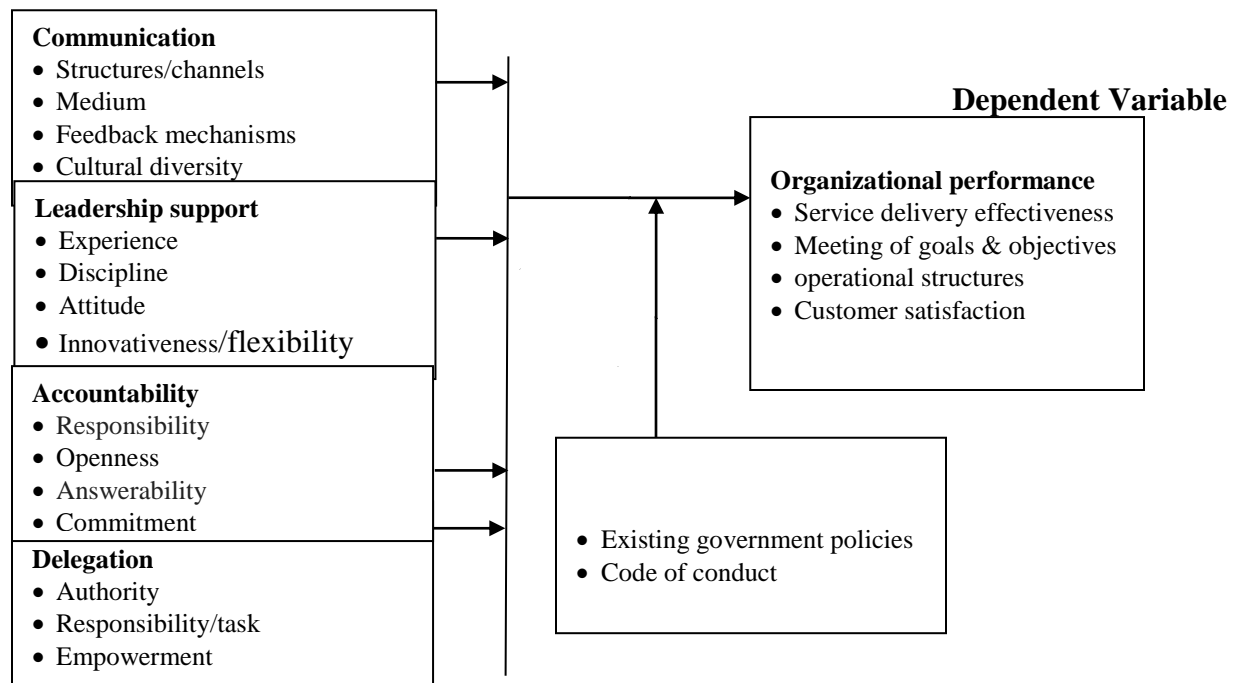


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Descriptive design was adopted which allowed proper research agenda interrogation. The approach was appropriate in helping to objectively explain inferences or causal connectivity of variables without any kind of manipulation by the researcher (Kothari, 2013). Furthermore, descriptive research design also enables generalization or inferring of the findings to the entire population (Ott & Longnecker, 2015).

Study Site

The research was conducted in Nyeri County Headquarters located in Nyeri Town. The county has an estimated population of 759,164 according to the 2019 population census (KBS, 2019). There are 30 wards in the county. Like most devolved government units, Nyeri County government is faced with numerous governance issues, hence the research location.

Target Population

The research population entailed employees in various key departments in the county government of Nyeri. Existing official records indicate that Nyeri County government has 10 condensed and streamlined governance departments for effective public service delivery. Based on the Nyeri County Integrated Development plan 2018-2022 and Human Resource Department, there were close to 263 employees who were stationed at the Nyeri County Headquarters. These individual employees were involved in the study based on their different work departments.

Table 3.1 Target Population

County Government Department	Target Population
Education and sports	24
Agriculture, livestock and fisheries	31
County public service and solid waste management	27
Health services	31
Transport, public works, infrastructure and energy	19
Lands, physical planning, housing and urban development	26
Finance and economic planning	22
Water, irrigation, environment & climate change	33
Gender, youth and social services	22
Trade, tourism, culture & corporate development	28
Total	263

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Population was first stratified based on the various key government departments involved in the study. Yamane formula

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

was used to select 159 employees spread across different departments in the headquarters of Nyeri County. In this case, n stood for sample size, N population total. Given N=263, the sample size was:

$$n = \frac{263}{1 + 263(.05)^2} = 159$$

Table 3.2 presents a summary of sample, where each category was proportionately outlined.

Table 3.2 Sample Size

County Government Department	Target Population	Sample Size
Education and sports	24	15
Agriculture, livestock and fisheries	31	19
County public service and solid waste management	27	16
Health services	31	19
Transport, public works, infrastructure and energy	19	11
Lands, physical planning, housing and urban development	26	16
Finance and economic planning	22	13
Water, irrigation, environment & climate change	33	20
Gender, youth and social services	22	13
Trade, tourism, culture & corporate development	28	17
Total	263	159

Research Instruments

A questionnaire was used due to its several advantages, such as easily capturing a lot of information with relative ease and therefore time-saving. Additionally, the tool enabled easy organizing of data for analysis partly due to uniform interpretation of the questions by all the respondents hence providing very credible data. Mixed data approach enriched data for the research.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Instrument validity denotes its ability to accurately capture or measure what it is meant for. The academic supervisor was closely consulted to guide on how to improve the questionnaire accordingly in order to meet its objective in terms of capturing the right data. Pretesting of the tool was also carried out to ascertain the level of the respondents' acceptability and common interpretation of the questions. Reliability is measuring of consistence of the tool for data collection (Kothari, 2013). It is a process for standardizing the research instrument so that it can measure what it was intended to test and help to validate the data so that it can be applicable to other similar population in different study environments. Cronbach's alpha (α) was generated after pilot data was entered and processed using SPSS to check internal consistence, where α was 0.81, thereby confirming that the questionnaire was of high standards.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through self-administering of the questionnaire and face-to-face interactions between the researcher/research assistants and the respondents. The approach applied was dictated by what was most convenient to individual respondents. This process was generally used with respondents who were able to read and correctly interpret the questionnaire on their own. Face-to-face interviews were on the other hand administered to individuals not able to administer the questionnaire on their own.

Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive and inferential data analysis methods were used, with the application of SPSS and excel worksheets and presented using tables and figures. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis method and presented using narratives.

Data Management and Ethical Considerations

During the process of fieldwork, relevant ethical principles of social research were strictly met. These included clearly explaining the research purpose and asking the respondents to participate freely without any form of coercion. Information shared was also kept confidential and anonymized at the publication stage in order to protect the respondents' privacy and assurance to their personal security.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of leadership practices on the performance of public organizations in Nyeri County Headquarters. Specific objectives included determining the influence of communication, leadership support, accountability, and the influence of delegation on organizational outputs of public entities in Kenya. Of 159 sampled participants, 113 were able to effectively participate in the study, accounting for a response rate of 71%.

Table 4.1 Response Rate

Category	Sample Size	Response Rate	
	Frequency (N)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Education and sports	15	11	73
Agriculture, livestock and fisheries	19	15	79
County public service and solid waste management	16	11	69
Health services	19	14	74
Transport, public works, infrastructure and energy	11	7	64
Lands, physical planning, housing and urban development	16	10	63
Finance and economic planning	13	10	77
Water, irrigation, environment & climate change	20	14	70
Gender, youth and social services	13	9	69
Trade, tourism, culture & corporate development	17	12	71
Total	159	113	71

Source: Author, 2023

As indicated in table 4.1, 10 different departments were involved in the study, with each one of them contributing to the pool of respondents by at least 63% of the 71% average response rate. The respondents were further asked about their socio-demographic characteristics, which were likely to influence their decisions related to leadership practices and performance of public organizations. These included gender, age bracket, education level, department of work, length of service in respective departments, current work assignment (designation).

Leadership Practices and Performance of Public Organizations

Leadership practices play an essential role in determining performance of public organizations in Kenya. Despite existence of operational structures to ensure smooth running of County government activities, there was evidence that some managers in government institutions did not strictly enforce good practices of open and effective communication, predictable and sustainable leadership support, stringent accountability measures, and proper delegation of duties, that together can engender a culture of teamwork and eventual good work outputs and effective service delivery to the public. Precisely, the research narrowed down to four thematic areas, including determining the influence of communication, the effect of leadership support, the influence of accountability, and delegation on performance of public organizations in Kenya. A number of key findings were documented in chapter four.

Influence of Communication on Performance of Public Organizations

There were majority of the views that communication significantly influenced performance of public organizations, with 53% of the respondents agreeing while the rest expressing either disagreement or uncertainty. Based on different propositions about how accountability influenced performance, 43% agreed whereas 34% strongly agreed that there were no clear structures/channels for interdepartmental information flow. This negatively affected performance of different functions in various government departments in Nyeri County headquarters.

There were also indications that there were no strong structures for effective passing of information across key departments/sections in the county operations. The findings further showed that there were no effective feedback mechanisms across different departments in the headquarters for smooth sharing of information to help in important decision making. Furthermore, 72% of the respondents felt that cultural diversity was not fully considered when designing information sharing and feedback mechanisms across different departments. Inferential statistics indicated that a unit increase in communication when all the other factors were considered to be constant lead to an improvement in performance of public organizations by a figure of 0.122 or 12.2%. At a 5% significance level, communication with $p=0.002$ which is less than 0.05 had significant influence on performance of public organizations.

Effect of Leadership Support on Performance of Public Organizations

Regarding the effect of leadership support, 76% of the respondents had the view that leadership support influenced performance of public organizations in Nyeri County to a great extent. Based on a number of propositions to measure how leadership support influenced performance of public organizations, 48% of the respondents agreed that there was no strong work discipline among the top leadership across different government departments in the county, which implied that there existed some gaps in leadership which could easily negatively affect institutional performance in different ways. At the same time, there were cases of wrong attitude of the top leadership in different government departments which derailed performance.

The study further revealed that other factors related to leadership support that influence performance in different county government departments included reluctant teamwork across different departments and a fragile open door policy which sometimes made it difficult for the junior staff to relate positively and productively with the senior management. Regarding inferential statistical analysis, the findings showed that a unit increase in this variable when the rest of the factors remained constant would cause an improvement in performance of public organizations by a figure of 0.121 or 12.1%. Additionally, at 5% significance level, leadership support ($p=0.001<0.05$) significantly influenced performance of public organizations in Nyeri County headquarters.

Influence of Accountability on Performance of Public Organizations

Accountability by top public officers was critical in effective execution of not only their duties, but for their entire teams they are in charge of. The findings of this study indicated that 73% of the respondents had the view that accountability influenced performance of public organizations in Nyeri County headquarters to a great extent. Using a number of propositions to examine how accountability influenced performance of public organizations in the county, 57% of the respondents agreed that top leadership in different key departments in the county hardly take responsibility for the actions/inactions whenever things go wrong. Instead, there is the culture of the leadership blaming junior employees whenever there are lapses in operations across different government departments in the county. At the same time, 70% of those who participated in the study had the view that there is lack of total exercise of openness/transparency in big offices in the county, thus negatively impacting performance of government departments.

Statistics further indicated that 72% agreed with the proposition that there are clear structures for employees to be answerable for their actions/inactions in the chain of command in the county. However, in many instances senior management in different public offices were less accountable than it was expected of the junior staff, especially in instances where things did not seem to go the right way. Overall, these findings showed that despite existing structures in the county for individual employees to be held accountable in their actions across different government offices, too much was expected of junior staff compared to the senior leadership. This also included the feeling that there is lack of work commitment by top leadership in various key departments in the county, with 49% of the respondent agreeing with this view. Inferential statistics showed that a unit increase when all the other factors remained constant would result into 0.133 or 13.3% improvement in performance of public organizations in Nyeri County headquarters. Furthermore, 5% significance level, accountability at $p=0.004<0.05$ significantly influenced performance of public organizations in both national and devolved institutions in the county.

Influence of Delegation on Performance of Public Organizations

Delegation of duties and responsibilities at the work place is important in creating confidence in the junior staff, enhances trust between the management and other general employees, and cements teamwork, among other benefits. It further emerged that 64% of the research participants had the view that delegation influenced performance of public organizations in Nyeri County to a great extent. Using different propositions to assess how delegation influenced performance of public organizations in the county, 49% agreed that there are no clear structures for delegation of authority across many departments in the county.

Also, 42% agreed with the view that majority of top managers in various departments in the county are reluctant to share their responsibilities, or tasks with their juniors. Such a scenario eroded confidence among the junior staff and created more suspicion among different cadres of

government staff across various hierarchies. At the same time, there were indications from the findings that 45% of the respondents agreed with the insinuation that majority of the departments in the county lacked clear empowerment programs for their junior staff.

A similar statistical distribution trend was noted regarding the proposition that majority of the departments in the county exhibit closed decision making systems where junior staffs are rarely involved, with 53% of the respondents holding this view. Overall, the findings established that there is a strong relationship between delegation of duties and performance of departments in Nyeri County. Inferential findings further revealed that a unit rise in delegation considering all other factors constant would lead to improvement in performance of public organizations by a margin of 0.124 or 12.4%. At a significance level of 5% and $p=0.003<0.05$, this implied that delegation had a significant influence on performance of public organizations.

DISCUSSION

Leadership is an indispensable element of organizational performance irrespective of countries or social setting. This study clearly reflected these views, which were largely shared in other previous researches. For instance, research by Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) showed that managers' leadership style in a Nigerian company significantly influenced organizational performance. Furthermore, leaders played a critical role in motivation of the staffs which eventually determined the extent of their willingness to effectively perform in their duties. As noted in the current study, Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) further established that participatory leadership approach enhanced the aspect of delegation which further improved staff performance. Leadership style also influenced the direction of the employees' efforts at corporate and personal levels.

Similarly, Mavin et al (2017) revealed that leaders or managers directly determine work values, culture, change direction, and employee motivation among other aspects which are critical in organizational outputs. This implies that it is the prerogative of the leader or manager to shape the institutional structures and give directions on how to effectively execute the visions of an organization. Despite the bureaucracies in government institutions such as at national government level, leadership plays an instrumental role in policy direction as well as day to day practices in public service delivery. These sentiments were evidently expressed in the current as well as previous studies carried out in different social settings both on the private and public sectors. Lack of proper communication skills and wrong personal attitudes among a number of government employees significantly influenced the situation related to organizational performance.

As also established in the current research, Morren (2018) noted that effective communication is very critical in organizational leadership in Kenya's public and private sector. This included vertical and horizontal communication where free flow of information made it easier for key decisions to be made on time and for the benefit of the organization. Leadership support is very important in the public sector. Both in a previous study by Mavin et al (2017) and the current research, it was noted that organizations' leaders or managers directly determine work values, culture, change direction, and employee motivation among other aspects which are critical in the general performance of an organization. These sentiments were also echoed by Riccucci and Van Ryzin (2016) by revealing that it is the prerogative of the leader or manager to shape the institutional structures and give directions on how to effectively execute the visions of an organization. The current research also noted that despite the bureaucracies in government institutions, leadership plays an instrumental role in policy direction as well as day to day practices in public service delivery.

As a general view regarding accountability, the current research showed that this factor engenders commitment of staff to work harder and display a high sense of creativity and innovation. These views were equally expressed by Laegreid (2014) by noting that accountability in organizational operations increases morale and satisfaction levels among the workforce hence translating into better outcomes for the entire organization. Similar views were noted by the current empirical inquiry by establishing a relationship between company performance and accountability of the leadership of an organization. A previous study by Halim and Agustawan (2019) on accountability in organizations in Indonesia, it emerged that performance, financial, hierarchical, professional, and legal accountability was the common constituents of accountability that determined public sector organizations. The findings of this study further echo the widespread sentiments expressed by Mathew et al (2016).

Delegation refers to the practice of managers sharing some of their responsibilities and authority with their immediate juniors. Inuwa (2016) noted that this process motivates the subordinates to develop a greater sense of belonging and appreciation by their bosses hence boosting their self-esteem and subsequently their performance at the workplace. Delegation provides managers an opportunity to focus on higher-level tasks while at the same time allowing those delegated to, to learn new skills. Ultimately, Makori (2014) argued that delegation improves productivity, efficiency, and time management by all employees who are involved. However, varied circumstances determine effect of delegation in an organization. However, this study noted that several managers in the public sector were not comfortable delegating to their juniors for fear of being outshone or insubordination by those being asked to hold the seniors' briefs.

Despite the numerous advantages of delegation, the study by Alhosani et al (2018) noted that poor delegation of duties to the juniors can lead to deteriorated quality of work output.

Furthermore, improper and less thoughtful delegation could cause injured team's morale, mistrust among team members, fear and anxiety and a sense of insecurity to those called upon to undertake duties and responsibilities for which they were not very well-prepared. In this sense, Kuria et al (2016) argued that effective delegation must be based on a high sense of authority, responsibility, and accountability. This in turn helped to boost the entire team's morale to perform better, which finally led to generally improved organizational performance. On the contrary, absence of delegation and consultation among employees on important decisions in an organization was responsible for employee dissatisfaction which can lead to agitation through strikes thereby negatively affecting organizational performance. In a study by Ugoani (2020) in commercial banks in Nigeria revealed that there is a direct correlation between effective delegation and performance of staff. This is because delegation provides employees a sense of autonomy and serves as a mark for trust by the senior management on the person being entrusted with the new responsibility. These views were largely reflected in the current research as well.

Implications to Research and Practice

This study concluded that practices of leadership have significantly influenced outputs of public organizations. Effective communication is the cornerstone of teamwork and a strong basis for important decision making for organizations. Therefore, different organizations in both public and private sectors should embrace the best leadership models and principles for better outputs of their industries. The study also noted that leadership support is critical in an organization's performance as this allows junior staff members to improve their capacities through effective support and mentorship from the senior management team. Adopting such principles and policy direction will go a long way in ensuring that public instructions effectively deliver in their mandates.

Furthermore, it was established in this study that accountability cannot be separated from the whole process of effective organizational management since it entrenches mutual trust and respect among all employees and encourages better outcomes at the work place through collective responsibility. Finally, the study concluded that delegation along hierarchical order in a work environment is important in helping junior staff to gain important skills from their immediate supervisors, thus preparing them to take up new roles with confidence whenever the right opportunity arises. In a general sense, the findings of this study will have valuable implications to research and practice in the area of public institutional governance in relation to public service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

All managers in public organizations should embrace the best leadership practices for improved and sustainable performance of their institutions. On the influence of communication on

performance of public organizations, the study concluded that senior public officers should embrace and practice open door policy where effective communication is entrenched in horizontal and vertical operations of their respective institutions. Regarding the effect of leadership support on performance of public organizations, the study finally noted that all public organizations must create HR policies that sustainably encourage leadership support for the junior staffs in order to inculcate effective generational handover of management during natural attrition of senior staff.

Concerning accountability and public organizations, management staff in public offices should encourage accountability at all levels of their organizations through transparent and accountable systems. Lastly, for effective delegation of duties, senior staffs must be regularly trained to understand the need for delegating duties to their juniors as a way of enhancing leadership skills and improving their level of confidence. This will also make it easier for handover whenever there is need for permanent assumption of office by those who were formerly occupying junior positions.

Further Research

A study should be done comparing leadership styles in public and private institutions and how these influence performances of national and devolved governments in Kenya regarding service delivery to the public.

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