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**Effect of Strategic Leadership Practices on
Organizational Performance in Service-Based
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Effect of Strategic Leadership Practices on Organizational Performance in Service-Based Organizations in Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the effect of strategic leadership practices on organizational performance in service-based organizations

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Strategic leadership practices such as vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management have a significant positive effect on organizational performance in service-based organizations. These practices enhance productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction by aligning organizational goals with employee efforts and improving operational efficiency.

Overall, effective strategic leadership enables organizations to achieve sustainable performance and maintain a competitive advantage.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Upper echelons theory, the resource-based view (RBV) theory & transformational leadership theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effect of strategic leadership practices on organizational performance in service-based organizations. From a practical standpoint, service-based organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of effective strategic leadership practices to enhance performance outcomes. From a policy perspective, governments and regulatory bodies should develop frameworks that promote effective leadership practices in service-based organizations.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership Practices, Organizational Performance, Service-Based Organizations*

INTRODUCTION

Organizational performance refers to the extent to which an organization achieves its goals effectively and efficiently, often measured through indicators such as productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. It reflects how well an organization utilizes its resources to generate value and sustain competitive advantage. In developed economies, organizational performance is strongly linked to innovation, technological advancement, and customer-centric strategies (Komen, 2024). For example, in the United States, firms have recorded consistent productivity growth driven by digital transformation and data-driven decision-making, contributing to higher profitability levels. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, improvements in service quality have led to steady increases in customer satisfaction, while in Japan, organizations emphasize efficiency and quality management, resulting in sustained high performance and customer loyalty (Gutterman, 2023).

In practice, organizations in developed economies enhance performance by integrating advanced technologies, improving operational processes, and focusing on customer experience. For instance, U.S. companies utilize analytics and automation to improve productivity and reduce operational costs, thereby increasing profitability. In the UK, service industries have improved performance through customer-focused innovations, leading to higher retention and satisfaction rates. Japanese firms, known for Total Quality Management (TQM), consistently achieve high service quality and operational efficiency. These approaches demonstrate that organizational performance in developed economies is driven by continuous improvement and innovation. Overall, the combination of financial and non-financial performance indicators enables organizations to achieve sustainable growth and competitiveness (Komen, 2024; Gutterman, 2023).

In developing economies, organizational performance is similarly defined by productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction, but it is often influenced by infrastructural limitations and resource constraints. Organizations in these economies strive to improve efficiency and competitiveness while adapting to dynamic market conditions. Empirical studies show that productivity improvements significantly enhance profitability and overall organizational performance in emerging markets (Rasheed, 2025). For example, in India, employee training initiatives have been associated with increased output per worker, reflecting improved productivity and efficiency. In Brazil, growth in the technology sector has contributed to increased profitability and improved service delivery, demonstrating positive performance trends (Komen, 2024).

Organizations in developing economies are increasingly adopting digital technologies and capacity-building strategies to enhance performance outcomes. Improved service quality and customer engagement have been shown to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are key indicators of performance. However, performance levels often vary due to differences in governance, infrastructure, and economic stability. Despite these challenges, firms that invest in human capital and operational efficiency tend to achieve better performance outcomes. Additionally, customer satisfaction is becoming a central focus as competition intensifies in these markets. Overall, developing economies are experiencing gradual improvements in organizational performance driven by innovation and strategic management practices (Rasheed, 2025; Komen, 2024).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, organizational performance is shaped by factors such as resource availability, infrastructure, and management practices, but it remains centered on productivity,

profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Organizations in this region often face challenges such as limited infrastructure and financial constraints, which can hinder performance. However, empirical evidence indicates that improvements in operational efficiency and management practices significantly enhance organizational performance (Asena & Oloko, 2025). For example, in Kenya, operational excellence has been shown to explain a significant proportion of variation in organizational performance, highlighting the importance of efficiency. Additionally, performance indicators such as customer satisfaction and service quality are increasingly used to evaluate success in the region.

Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa are progressively adopting digital transformation, employee training, and customer-focused strategies to improve performance outcomes. For instance, training and development initiatives have been linked to increased productivity and improved service delivery, which contribute to higher profitability. Customer satisfaction is also becoming a key determinant of organizational performance, particularly in sectors such as banking and telecommunications. Despite existing challenges, there is a growing trend toward improved performance driven by innovation and better management practices. Organizations that align their operations with customer needs and efficiency goals tend to achieve better outcomes. Overall, Sub-Saharan Africa is gradually improving organizational performance, although it still faces structural and operational constraints (Asena & Oloko, 2025; Engagedly, 2024).

Strategic leadership practices refer to the actions and decisions undertaken by organizational leaders to guide long-term direction, enhance competitiveness, and improve overall performance outcomes. Four key strategic leadership practices commonly identified in literature include vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management, each playing a critical role in influencing organizational performance indicators such as productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Vision setting involves establishing a clear organizational direction and aligning employees toward shared goals, which enhances productivity and organizational cohesion (Samimi, Cortes, Anderson, & Herrmann, 2020). Decision-making, particularly strategic and data-driven decision-making, enables leaders to allocate resources efficiently and respond to environmental changes, thereby improving profitability and operational performance. Employee empowerment focuses on granting autonomy, skills, and authority to employees, which increases motivation, service quality, and job performance outcomes (Raja, 2020). Change management ensures that organizations adapt effectively to internal and external changes, thereby sustaining competitiveness and long-term performance.

The integration of these strategic leadership practices creates a synergistic effect that enhances organizational performance across multiple dimensions. For instance, a well-defined vision combined with effective decision-making fosters innovation and strategic alignment, leading to improved productivity and profitability. Employee empowerment contributes to higher service quality and customer satisfaction by enabling employees to respond effectively to customer needs. Similarly, effective change management helps organizations navigate uncertainty and maintain performance stability during transitions. Empirical studies indicate that organizations that adopt participatory leadership and adaptive strategies tend to achieve higher levels of performance and customer satisfaction (Samimi et al., 2020; Raja, 2020). Overall, strategic leadership practices serve as critical drivers of organizational success by aligning resources, motivating employees, and ensuring adaptability in dynamic business environments.

Problem Statement

Service-based organizations operate in highly dynamic and competitive environments where performance is largely driven by intangible factors such as service quality, customer satisfaction, employee productivity, and organizational efficiency. Despite the growing recognition of strategic leadership practices such as vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management as critical drivers of organizational success, many service organizations continue to experience inconsistent performance outcomes. Empirical studies indicate that although strategic leadership has a positive influence on organizational performance, its effectiveness largely depends on how well these practices are implemented and aligned with organizational goals (Samimi, 2020; Raja, 2020). In many cases, weak strategic direction, limited employee involvement, and poor change management processes hinder the achievement of optimal performance. This suggests that the mere presence of leadership structures does not guarantee improved organizational performance without effective strategic leadership practices (Samimi, 2020).

Furthermore, there is limited empirical clarity on how specific strategic leadership practices individually and collectively influence organizational performance in service-based organizations. Existing literature has largely focused on general leadership styles rather than examining key practices such as vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management within an integrated framework (Raja, 2020; Samimi, 2020). Additionally, contextual factors such as organizational culture, technological advancement, and industry dynamics influence the effectiveness of these leadership practices, yet they remain underexplored in many studies. In service-based sectors, where service quality and customer satisfaction are critical indicators of performance, the lack of clarity on the most effective leadership practices presents a significant research gap. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effect of strategic leadership practices on organizational performance in service-based organizations to provide evidence-based insights for improving productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction (Samimi, 2020; Raja, 2020).

Theoretical Review

Upper Echelons Theory

Upper echelons theory was developed by Donald Hambrick and Phyllis Mason in 1984 and posits that organizational outcomes are partially predicted by the characteristics and decisions of top executives. The main theme of the theory is that leaders' values, experiences, and cognitive bases shape strategic choices, which in turn influence organizational performance. In the context of strategic leadership practices, elements such as vision setting and decision-making reflect leaders' strategic orientation and directly affect productivity, profitability, and service quality. The theory is relevant because it explains how leadership behaviors at the top level determine how resources are allocated and how strategies are executed in service-based organizations. Thus, variations in leadership practices can lead to differences in organizational performance outcomes (Samimi, 2020).

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The resource-based view (RBV) theory was advanced by Jay Barney in 1991 and emphasizes that organizations achieve competitive advantage through valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-

substitutable resources. The central idea is that internal capabilities, including leadership competencies and organizational processes, are key drivers of performance. Strategic leadership practices such as employee empowerment and change management can be viewed as internal capabilities that enhance organizational effectiveness. This theory is relevant because it explains how leadership practices contribute to building strong organizational capabilities that improve productivity and customer satisfaction. In service-based organizations, where human capital and service delivery are critical, strategic leadership becomes a key resource influencing performance outcomes (Raja, 2020).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory was introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and later expanded by Bernard Bass. The theory focuses on leaders' ability to inspire, motivate, and transform employees to achieve higher levels of performance. Its main theme is that transformational leaders create a compelling vision, encourage innovation, and empower employees to exceed expectations. In relation to strategic leadership practices, vision setting and employee empowerment are core elements that enhance motivation, service quality, and customer satisfaction. The theory is relevant because it explains how leadership behaviors influence employee attitudes and organizational culture, which ultimately affect performance outcomes. Therefore, transformational leadership practices are essential in service-based organizations where employee interaction directly impacts service delivery and customer experience (Samimi, 2020).

Empirical Review

Wambua and Karihe (2023) examined the influence of strategic leadership practices on the performance of commercial banks listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange in Kenya. The purpose of the study was to determine how leadership communication and strategic control influence organizational performance in service-based organizations. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design to collect data from managers in commercial banks. The study targeted top-level and middle-level managers involved in strategic decision-making. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. The collected data was analyzed using correlation and regression analysis. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between strategic leadership practices and organizational performance. The study reported a high coefficient of determination, indicating that leadership practices explained a significant proportion of performance variation. Communication was found to enhance coordination and operational efficiency. Strategic control improved monitoring and evaluation of performance outcomes. The study also showed that effective leadership aligns organizational goals with performance objectives. It further established that leadership practices contribute to improved productivity and service delivery. The researchers concluded that strategic leadership is a critical determinant of performance in commercial banks. The study recommended strengthening internal communication and leadership accountability systems. It also suggested continuous leadership development programs to sustain performance improvements.

Nyamao, Munga and Mbebe (2025) investigated the effect of strategic direction on organizational performance in four-star hotels in Nairobi County, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to examine how vision, mission, and core values influence performance outcomes in service-based organizations. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected from managers and supervisors working in the hotel sector. The study used structured questionnaires to

gather primary data. A census approach was applied to include all targeted respondents. Data analysis was conducted using correlation and regression techniques. The findings indicated a strong positive relationship between strategic direction and organizational performance. The correlation coefficient showed a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Strategic direction was found to improve goal alignment and organizational focus. The study revealed that clear vision and mission statements enhance employee commitment. It also showed that strategic clarity improves service quality and customer satisfaction. The researchers concluded that strategic direction is essential for achieving organizational performance. The study recommended strengthening strategic planning processes in hotels. It also suggested aligning organizational objectives with customer needs to enhance performance (Nyamao et al., 2025).

Ng'olua, Rintari and Kanyaru (2024) studied the influence of strategic leadership styles on the performance of three-star hotels in the Mount Kenya East Region. The purpose of the study was to assess how leadership styles affect strategy implementation and performance outcomes. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey design. Data was collected from general managers, supervisors, and departmental heads. The study used structured questionnaires for data collection. A census approach was applied to include all hotels in the region. Data analysis involved Pearson correlation, ANOVA, and regression techniques. The findings revealed that leadership styles significantly influence organizational performance. Strategic leadership was found to affect decision-making and operational effectiveness. The study showed that leadership involvement improves strategy implementation. It also indicated that top management plays a key role in driving performance outcomes. The researchers concluded that effective leadership enhances organizational productivity and service delivery. The study recommended strengthening leadership capacity at all management levels. It also suggested improving coordination between departments to enhance performance.

Boane, Gichunge and Miluwi (2024) examined the influence of strategic leadership on the performance of hospitality companies in Maputo Province, Mozambique. The purpose of the study was to determine how leadership supports strategy implementation and organizational success. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected from employees working in hospitality organizations. The study used structured questionnaires to gather primary data. Data analysis was conducted using correlation and regression techniques. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance. The correlation coefficient indicated a significant association between the variables. Strategic leadership was found to enhance staff cooperation and operational efficiency. The study also showed that leadership improves financial performance and service quality. It indicated that leadership supports innovation and organizational growth. The researchers concluded that strategic leadership is essential for performance improvement. The study recommended strengthening leadership development programs in hospitality firms. It also suggested improving employee engagement to enhance performance outcomes.

Mohamed and Nzili (2024) assessed the influence of strategic leadership on organizational performance in charitable non-governmental organizations in Nairobi County. The purpose of the study was to examine how leadership practices influence performance in service-oriented nonprofit organizations. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected from employees working in NGOs. The study used structured questionnaires to gather primary data. A sample of respondents was selected using appropriate sampling techniques. Data analysis

was conducted using regression analysis. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance. Leadership practices were found to improve organizational effectiveness and service delivery. The study showed that strategic leadership enhances employee motivation and productivity. It also indicated that leadership influences customer satisfaction in service organizations. The researchers concluded that strategic leadership is a key driver of performance. The study recommended developing clear vision and mission statements. It also suggested strengthening leadership capacity to improve organizational outcomes.

Kinyua (2024) investigated the influence of strategic leadership on the performance of public hospitals in Embu County, Kenya. The purpose of the study was to determine how leadership practices affect performance in healthcare organizations. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected from healthcare workers and patients. The study used structured questionnaires to gather primary data. A sample of respondents was selected for analysis. Data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that strategic leadership significantly influences organizational performance. Leadership practices were found to improve service delivery and patient satisfaction. The study showed that vision and mission statements enhance organizational direction. It also indicated that leadership improves operational efficiency in hospitals. The researchers concluded that strategic leadership is essential for healthcare performance. The study recommended strengthening leadership practices in public hospitals. It also suggested improving strategic planning processes to enhance performance.

Mohammed and Al-Abrow (2023) examined the impact of empowering and transformational leadership on organizational performance and innovation in the Iraqi healthcare sector. The purpose of the study was to determine how leadership practices influence performance and innovation outcomes. The researchers adopted a quantitative research design. Data was collected from employees working in healthcare organizations. The study used structured questionnaires for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using statistical modeling techniques. The findings revealed that empowering leadership significantly improves organizational performance. Transformational leadership was found to enhance employee motivation and innovation. The study showed that leadership practices influence organizational culture. It also indicated that leadership improves service quality and customer satisfaction. The researchers concluded that strategic leadership practices are critical for organizational success. The study recommended adopting empowering leadership approaches. It also suggested strengthening organizational culture to support performance and innovation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gap

The reviewed studies conceptualize strategic leadership in fragmented ways by focusing on isolated dimensions such as communication and control (Wambua & Karihe, 2023), strategic direction (Nyamao 2025), leadership styles (Ng'olua, 2024), and empowerment or transformational leadership (Mohammed & Al-Abrow, 2023). While these studies confirm that strategic leadership influences organizational performance, they do not provide a comprehensive and integrated framework that captures key strategic leadership practices such as vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management simultaneously. Additionally, most studies treat organizational performance as a general outcome without clearly linking specific leadership practices to distinct performance indicators such as productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Some studies also fail to incorporate mediating or moderating variables such as organizational culture, innovation, or employee engagement that could explain how leadership practices translate into performance outcomes. This creates a conceptual gap in understanding the mechanisms and relative contribution of each leadership practice to organizational performance. Therefore, there is a need for a study that adopts a multidimensional approach to both strategic leadership practices and organizational performance.

Contextual Gap

The findings across the reviewed studies vary depending on the organizational context, indicating inconsistencies in how strategic leadership practices influence performance. For example, Wambua and Karihe (2023) emphasized communication and control in the banking sector, while Nyamao (2025) highlighted strategic direction in hotels, and Kinyua (2024) focused on leadership in public hospitals. Similarly, Mohamed and Nzili (2024) examined non-governmental organizations, and Boane (2024) focused on hospitality firms, each producing context-specific findings. These variations suggest that industry characteristics, organizational structure, and service delivery models significantly influence the effectiveness of strategic leadership practices. However, most studies do not deeply analyze how these contextual factors shape the leadership–performance relationship. Additionally, the rapid evolution of service-based organizations, particularly with digital transformation, is not adequately captured in these studies. This creates a contextual gap in understanding how strategic leadership practices operate in modern, technology-driven service environments. Therefore, further research is needed to examine strategic leadership practices within a clearly defined and contemporary service-based context.

Geographical Gap

Geographically, the reviewed studies are concentrated in specific regions such as Kenya (Wambua & Karihe, 2023; Nyamao, 2025; Kinyua, 2024), Mozambique (Boane, 2024), and Iraq (Mohammed & Al-Abrow, 2023), with limited cross-country or regional comparative analysis. Most studies are also localized within specific counties or regions, such as Nairobi County and Mount Kenya East, which limits the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that compare strategic leadership practices across different Sub-Saharan African countries or between developing and developed economies. The absence of such comparative studies limits the understanding of how geographical and socio-economic differences influence organizational performance. Furthermore, some regions and service sectors remain under-researched, particularly in emerging economies with rapidly growing

service industries. This creates a geographical gap in understanding the broader applicability of strategic leadership practices. Therefore, there is a need for studies that expand geographical coverage and provide more generalizable and comparative insights across different regions and service-based organizations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, strategic leadership practices play a fundamental role in shaping organizational performance in service-based organizations by influencing key outcomes such as productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Practices such as vision setting, effective decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management enable organizations to align their goals, optimize resource utilization, and respond effectively to dynamic market conditions. Empirical evidence consistently shows that organizations with strong strategic leadership achieve higher levels of efficiency, improved service delivery, and enhanced customer experiences. These practices also foster employee motivation and engagement, which are critical drivers of performance in service-oriented environments where human interaction is central to value creation.

Overall, the effectiveness of strategic leadership practices depends on their integration, adaptability, and alignment with organizational context and objectives. Service-based organizations that adopt a holistic and proactive leadership approach are better positioned to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and long-term growth. However, variations in context, industry dynamics, and organizational capabilities influence the extent to which these practices translate into performance outcomes. Therefore, continuous evaluation, leadership development, and adoption of innovative strategies are essential for maximizing the impact of strategic leadership. Future efforts should focus on refining leadership practices and adapting them to evolving service environments to ensure consistent and improved organizational performance.

Recommendations

Theory

From a theoretical perspective, future research should adopt a more integrated approach to strategic leadership by combining key practices such as vision setting, decision-making, employee empowerment, and change management into a unified framework. This will enhance understanding of how these practices interact to influence organizational performance outcomes such as productivity, profitability, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Scholars should also incorporate mediating and moderating variables such as organizational culture, innovation, employee engagement, and digital transformation to better explain the leadership–performance relationship. There is a need to extend existing theories such as Upper Echelons Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Transformational Leadership Theory to service-based contexts, where human interaction plays a central role. Additionally, future studies should employ longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of leadership practices and their long-term effects on organizational performance. Developing context-specific theoretical models tailored to service industries in emerging and Sub-Saharan economies will further strengthen theoretical contributions.

Practice

From a practical standpoint, service-based organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of effective strategic leadership practices to enhance performance outcomes. Leaders should focus on establishing clear organizational visions and aligning them with operational goals to improve productivity and efficiency. Organizations should adopt data-driven decision-making processes to enhance strategic planning and resource allocation. Employee empowerment should be emphasized through training, delegation, and participatory leadership to improve motivation, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Additionally, organizations should implement effective change management strategies to adapt to technological advancements and evolving customer needs. Continuous leadership development programs and performance evaluation systems should be established to ensure that leadership practices remain relevant and effective in achieving organizational objectives.

Policy

From a policy perspective, governments and regulatory bodies should develop frameworks that promote effective leadership practices in service-based organizations. Policies should encourage leadership development programs, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, and finance, to improve service delivery and organizational performance. Regulatory institutions should establish guidelines that promote transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership practices within organizations. There is also a need for policies that support digital transformation and innovation, enabling organizations to adopt modern leadership approaches and technologies. Furthermore, policymakers should promote capacity-building initiatives and training programs that enhance leadership competencies across industries. Finally, institutions should encourage benchmarking and reporting on organizational performance indicators to ensure continuous improvement and accountability in service-based organizations.

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