



**INFLUENCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NYERI COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was geared towards establishing the influence of transformational leadership on performance of public universities in Nyeri County, Kenya. Transformational leadership theory was adopted in this study. Descriptive approach and systematic random sampling techniques were used. Israel formula was utilized to calculate the ideal sample size of 241 from a target population of 607. Industry experts and scholars from Kenyatta university were used to test content and face validity of the research instrument while internal consistence was tested using Cronbach Alpha method. Descriptive and regression methods were adopted to analyse data and thereafter tables and figures were used to present the analysed data. The study found that transformational leadership has a positive and significant influence on performance. The study concluded that transformational leadership seeks to lower staff turnover by making people feel more engaged and included in the organization. It focuses on the positive impact of the change for the greater good and guides employees on how they can contribute to it. The study recommended that the organizational leaders need to create and communicate an inspiring vision of the future by understanding the values of the employees they lead, the capabilities and resources of the organization and conducting an intelligent analysis of the environment that the organization faces and selecting the best way forward within it.*

**Key Words:** Leadership, Change Management

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## INTRODUCTION

Transformational leadership is viewed as a process whereby leaders in organizations always focus on aspects intended to transform an organization by using employees who are effectively motivated (Jung & Wang, 2016). Transformational leaders not only mentor and support workers but also create an environment that make employees own the change process make independent decisions (Javed, 2015). Transformative leadership emphasize on achieving organizational goals by well-motivated workers (Karthi *et al.*, 2012). Employee development is described by Ismyrlis and Moschidis (2015) as the ability of the organization train its workers for better results. Knowledgeable and skilled workers have the capacity to develop new ideas unlike untrained workers. Effective service delivery in the organization is directly attributed to the knowledge workers possess in relation to customer management skills (Fotopoulos, psomas & Vouzas, 2010).

Performance is viewed as a multidimensional facet. However, from one organization to another, it can be defined differently. Daft (2010) regards organizational performance as the actual results obtained from a particular input. Equally, Kaplan and Norton (2010) regard it as the ability of managers to utilize resources more effectively with an aim of maximizing outputs. The authors argue that, performance in any organization can be measured using two perspectives. Financial perspective metrics are profits, liquidity return on investment and return on equity while non-financial perspective metrics involve: new product development, change implementation, customer loyalty, technology integration and good corporate governance.

Public universities are regarded as institutions of higher learning created under the Acts of parliament of Kenya with an aim of providing education services (Ministry of Education, 2019). Since independence in Kenya, universities have been offering certificate, diploma and degree programs intended to promote social-economic

development. Due to changes in the higher education sector in Kenya which have been accelerated by repealing of the higher Education Act, new universities have been created due to the increased demand of education services (Ministry of Education, 2018). The change of 7-4-2-3 education system to 8.4.4 education system did not only increase the demand of higher education services but also resulted to transformation of technical colleges into public universities in order to address the overwhelming demand of education services in Kenya (Council of Legal Education of Kenya, 2018).

Due to weaknesses of Commission for Higher Education (CHE), a new commission which is Commission for University Education (CUE) was formed in 2012 to address issues associated with the quality of higher education services (Council of Legal Education of Kenya, 2018). Despite efforts of CUE in Kenya, majority (91%) of the public universities in Kenya are experiencing numerous challenges that range from capacity development, competition, deteriorating service delivery and issues of corporate governance (CUE, 2018). With increased enrolment of students in public universities, this study will focus on public universities in Nyeri County in order to establish how quality management enablers can influence performance thus bridging the information gaps in the university context.

### Statement of the Problem

Public universities in Kenya and more specifically in Nyeri County are not only experiencing challenges of underfunding by the ministry of education but also shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff to provide services (Magutu *et al.*, 2018). Issues of employee strikes and inadequate physical facilities such as hostels, lecture halls and playgrounds are some of the aspects which have hindered service delivery in the university context (CUE, 2018). Further, inability of the graduates to secure formal jobs immediately after graduating is attributed to compromised quality of service delivery in public universities thus the need for management of

public universities to rethink on quality management enablers to improve performance (Federation of Kenya Employers, 2019)

Commission for University Education (2018) indicates that service delivery in public universities in Kenya is an issue of concern that needs novel approaches rather than the linear models. Similarly, UNESCO (2016) indicates that service delivery in institutions of higher learning institutions is questionable thus the need for this study. In spite of the efforts by the government to offer quality higher education services, public universities have been underperforming over the years. Issues of change management, periodical employee strikes have not only ignited reactions from parents, students, employers and the government but also hampered universities from realizing their long term goals.

Despite extensive studies which have been conducted in Kenya by Chepkemai and Bett (2018), Migide (2018), Oduor (2015) and Magutu *et al.* (2010), it is observed that their findings are inconclusive thus cannot be generalized in this study. This study was informed by constraints of conceptualizing and operationalizing variables studies. To ascertain whether the finding of these studies will hold true from one context to another, it is against this premise this study will be undertaken to ascertain if there exists convergence or divergence in findings. Furthermore, this study is informed by disputed results of empirical studies. Chepkemai and Bett (2018), Migide (2018) and Oduor (2015) revealed a positive and significant link between quality management practices and firm performance, though in different contexts while Magutu *et al.* (2018) found a moderate association between leadership and firm performance. Considering that disputed findings from the studies, it is against this premise this study will seek to establish the effect of quality management enablers on organizational performance in the university context.

## **Research Objective**

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of transformational leadership on performance of public universities in Nyeri County.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

This theory was pioneered by Downton (1970) and later was advanced by Burns (1978) The theory views leadership as a function of organizational performance. The theory argues that good leadership in organizations can result to organizational productivity. It is argued by the theory that leaders who serve as role models are likely to shape the behaviour of workers. Leaders who recognize and support workers to own the change process in any organization are likely to face minimal resistance from workers (Evangelos & Psomas, 2013).

The theory argues that organizations which succeed in implementing new policies formulated are attributed to competitive practices such as employee motivation, technological integration in the system and ability of the leaders to challenge the status quo (Fotopoulos, Psomas & Vouzas, 2010). The theory opines that transformative leaders in any competitive organization are always keen in rewarding behaviour rather than individuals (Choi & Eboch, 2008). Furthermore, the theory suggests that organizations that fail to navigate in the dynamic business environment are highly rigid to embrace transformational leadership. Transactional leadership which is attributed with autocratic tendencies of management not only demotivate workers but discourage the spirit of creativity and innovation among workers (Bell & Omachonu, 2011).

Universities that emphasize on training workers and recognizing employee talents are likely to perform more effectively. Delegation of duties to workers and creating an enabling environment that provide workers with confidence to implement new policies will not only boost employee morale but improve overall performance of the university (Fotopoulos

et al.,2010).This theory is retested in this study based on the notion that performance of public universities in Kenya can be influenced by transformational leadership which is measured by antecedents such as participatory decision making, delegation of duties and change implementation.

**Empirical Review**

Using a correlational research design and a sample size of 117, it was revealed that there exists a strong positive link between transformative leadership, organizational innovation and firm performance (Arif, 2018). It was also observed that organizational innovation can have a significant performance of multinational corporations in Pakistan. Further, it is noted that the study focused on multinational corporations in Pakistan which is a different context geographically and culturally as compared to higher education context in Kenya.

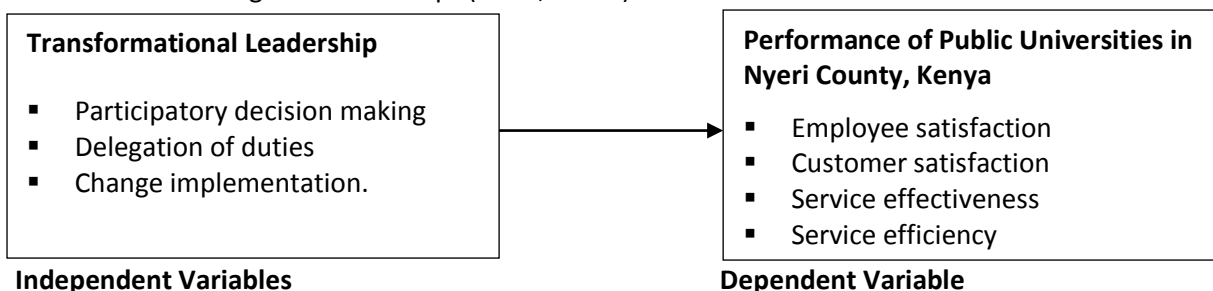
Even though Abu Orabi and Tareq (2016) identified a significant association between transformational leadership style and performance of commercial banks, it was noted that the findings cannot be generalized in this study. Independent variables of the study were: idealized, inspirational, intellectual simulation and individual contrary to variables of this study; employee development, continuous improvement and technological initiatives. It was concluded that for improved organizational performance, emphasize on transformational leadership styles which seeks to involves workers in key decisions is key. Failure of leaders to involve employees in key decisions not only hampers organizational creativity but also result to organizational inertia.

Organizations committed in employee development are attributed to good leadership (Amin, 2016).

Even though transformational leadership was identified to be positively influencing performance of the National Bank of Kenya, it is impossible to generalize this finding in this study. Given that the study adopted a descriptive approach to collect data from 84 respondents, this study will address this research gaps by adopting a cross sectional research design and random sampling technique to collect data in the university setting.

Transformational leadership is directly attributed to organizational performance (Mbithi, K’Obonyo & Awino, 2016). The authors identified that, even though leaders in organizations may adopt different styles in order to achieve objectives, to a large extent it was concluded that organizations which managed to navigate through turbulent business environment were attributed to good leadership. Adoption of structural equation model to analyse data not only pose methodological research gaps to be addressed by this study but also conceptual and contextual research gaps.

Organizational change is directly associated with transformative leadership (Awuor, 2015). Commitment of employees to work is accelerated by transformative leadership. Employee resistance and inability to be creative and innovative is attributed to transactional leadership. Even though this study established differences between transformational leadership and firm performance, it is concluded that the findings cannot be generalized in this study. In contrast, variables of this study will be operationalized using Kurt Lewin, Total Quality Management and technology acceptance theories.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive research design. This study targeted two public universities where 607 respondents formed the total population. The respondents of the study constituted university employees. In this case, the unit of observation was public universities and unit of analysis was employees of public universities in Nyeri County. A sample size for this study was obtained from Karatina and Dedan Kimathi universities. Respondents of this study comprised of administrators and secretaries while the teaching staff were professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and tutorial fellows. Self-developed questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Questionnaires were administered during working hours of the day. Data was cleaned and coded with the help of computer

software. Data was then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Descriptive Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed descriptively using Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 and presented in Tables based on specific objectives and the findings were shown as follows:

### Transformational Leadership

The study sought to determine the influence of transformational leadership on performance of public universities in Nyeri County. Table 1 presented the results.

**Table 1: Transformational Leadership**

Statement	M	SD
I am part of the decisions made by the university	4.07	1.168
I am given the opportunity to make independent decisions	4.06	0.831
Employees who embrace new changes are rewarded	4.31	0.588
I am mentored before assigned new duties	4.10	1.130
I am motivated effectively	4.02	0.852
Promotions are made in my university based on individual performance	4.28	0.611
Employees who implement new initiatives are rewarded	4.07	0.847
My managers always encourage dialogue	4.54	0.525
My managers always encourage teamwork	4.51	0.616
My leaders are appreciative	4.63	0.494
There is interpersonal relations between top and lower level employees	3.72	1.570
There is employee team work in my university	3.29	1.514
Employees are given the opportunity to learn from mistakes	4.52	0.781
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>4.16</b>	<b>0.887</b>

Source: Survey Data (2020)

The results in Table 1 indicated that the respondents agreed that transformational leadership influences the performance of public universities in Nyeri County as indicated by aggregate mean score of 4.16 with a standard deviation of 0.887. These findings concurred with Abu Orabi and Tareq (2016) study that identified a significant association between transformational leadership style and performance of commercial banks and the study concluded that for improved organizational performance, emphasize on

transformational leadership styles which seeks to involves workers in key decisions is key.

The respondent strongly agreed on the statements that their leaders are appreciative, their managers always encourage dialogue, employees are given the opportunity to learn from mistakes and that their managers always encourage teamwork as indicated by mean of 4.63, 4.54, 4.52 and 4.51 respectively and 0.494, 0.525, 0.781 and 0.616 as respective standard deviation. These findings are in

line with the findings of Amin (2016) study that found that organizations committed in employee development are attributed to good leadership and that transformational leadership was identified to be positively influencing performance of the National Bank of Kenya.

The respondent agreed on the statements that employees who embrace new changes are rewarded, promotions are made in their university based on individual performance, they are mentored before assigned new duties, they are part of the decisions made by the university, employees who implement new initiatives are rewarded, they are given the opportunity to make independent decisions, they are motivated effectively and that there is interpersonal relations between top and lower level employees as indicated by mean score of 4.31, 4.28, 4.10, 4.07, 4.07, 4.06, 4.02 and 3.72 respectively and 0.588, 0.611, 1.130, 1.168, 0.847, 0.831, 0.852 and 1.570 as respective standard deviation. These findings are consistent with Mbithi, K'Obonyo and Awino (2016) study that

established that transformational leadership is directly attributed to organizational performance and also identified that, even though leaders in organizations may adopt different styles in order to achieve objectives, to a large extent it was concluded that organizations which managed to navigate through turbulent business environment were attributed to good leadership.

The respondents to a moderate extent indicated that there is employee team work in my university as shown by mean score of 3.29 and standard deviation of 1.514. This is in disagreement with Abu Orabi and Tareq (2016) study that revealed that improved organizational performance, emphasize on transformational leadership styles which seeks to involves workers in key decisions is key. Similarly, Awuor (2015) study disagree with this finding that observe that employee resistance and inability to be creative and innovative is attributed to lack of teamwork spirit among employees in an organization.

## Measures of Performance

**Table 2: Measures of Performance**

Statement	M	SD
Customers of my university are served within the shortest time possible	3.83	1.525
Employees of my university are dedicated with their work	3.28	1.743
Employees of my university are willing to adopt new changes	3.91	1.085
Customers of my university are happy with services provided	4.88	0.402
There are minimal complaints from university customers	4.83	0.373
There is an increased number of student enrolment in my university	3.98	0.304
Referrals are made by satisfied customers of my university	4.06	1.699
Majority of the workers are satisfied with corporate governance of my university	4.71	0.566
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>0.952</b>

**Source: Survey Data (2020)**

The results in Table 2 indicated that the respondents agreed that quality management enablers such as transformational leadership influences the performance of public universities in Nyeri County as indicated by aggregate mean score of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.952. This agreed with Olepein (2015) who asserts that quality management enablers are interventions

organizations embrace in order to achieve their short-term or long-term goals. Quality management enablers are conceptualized to have a significant influence on organizational performance from one context to another despite the fact that there exist differences on parameters that are used by organizations to measure performance.

The respondents strongly agreed on the statements that customers of their university are happy with services provided, there are minimal complaints from university customers and that majority of the workers are satisfied with corporate governance of my university as shown by mean score of 4.88, 4.83 and 4.71 respectively and 0.402, 0.566 and 0.373 as respective standard deviation. This is in line with Bell and Omachonu (2011) who observe that quality management enablers are considered to be functions of organizational performance. According to Olepein (2015) organizational performance is the maximization of outputs from limited inputs. It can be evaluated using financial and non-financial parameters. Financial parameters involve: profits, costs, return on investments and liquidity while non-financial parameters involve: new product development, ability to implement new changes, customer and employee satisfaction.

The respondents agreed on the statements that referrals are made by satisfied customers of their university, there is an increased number of student enrolments in their university, employees of their university are willing to adopt new changes and that customers of my university are served within the shortest time possible as shown by mean score of 4.06, 3.83, 3.91 and 3.98 respectively with respective standard deviation of 1.699, 0.304, 1.085 and 1.525. This concurs with Kiptum (2016) who observe that quality management enablers are a set of coordinated activities adopted or embraced by organizations in order to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

### **Inferential Statistics**

From the results, the study results showed that transformational leadership have a positive and significant influence on performance of public universities in Nyeri County. These findings were consistent with Mbithi, K'Obonyo and Awino (2016) study that established that transformational leadership is directly attributed to organizational performance and also identified that, even though leaders in organizations may adopt different styles in order to achieve objectives, to a large extent it

was concluded that organizations which managed to navigate through turbulent business environment were attributed to good leadership.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study sought to determine the influence of transformational leadership on performance of public universities in Nyeri County and found that transformational leadership had a positive and significant influence on performance. Leaders are appreciative, their managers always encourage dialogue, employees are given the opportunity to learn from mistakes, managers always encourage teamwork, employees who embrace new changes are rewarded, promotions are made in their university based on individual performance and that they are mentored before assigned new duties.

The study concluded that transformational leadership seeks to lower staff turnover by making people feel more engaged and included in the organization. It focuses on the positive impact of the change for the greater good and guides employees on how they can contribute to it. Thus, making it much easier for employees to embrace the change and even enjoy it. Transformational leaders tend to be values-driven and ethics-focused, which encourages the company's employees to stick to the straight and narrow and act in the best interest of the company and its wider communities.

The study recommended that the organizational leaders need to create and communicate an inspiring vision of the future by understanding the values of the their employees they lead, the capabilities and resources of the organization and conducting an intelligent analysis of the environment that the organization faces and selecting the best way forward within it. The leaders should motivate their employees to buy into and deliver the vision by appealing to their values and inspiring them with where they are going to lead them and why. The leaders should manage delivery of the vision through combining effective project management with sensitive



change management and communicating each employee's roles and responsibilities clearly and connecting these to organizational plans.

### **Suggestion for Further Studies**

The study aimed at determining the influence of transformational leadership on employee

performance. Therefore, the study suggested that further studies should be carried out that focus on different conceptualization of quality management enablers to establish the extent to which they influence the performance of public universities in Nyeri County, Kenya.

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