

Employees' Performance in Selected Public Universities in Kenya: The Paradoxical Effects of the Leadership Styles

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i6/21927>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i6/21927

Published Date: 23 June 2024

Abstract

Public universities in Kenya face significant challenges in managing a diverse workforce. These challenges include aligning diversity practices with organizational goals, managing ethnic and cultural differences, and addressing generational and age differences. Understanding the impact of leadership styles on employee performance is crucial for improving organizational effectiveness. This research investigated the effect of various leadership styles on employee performance in selected public universities in Kenya, focusing on democratic, autocratic, transformational, and transactional leadership styles. The research was based on the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, human capital theory, and contingency theory. A descriptive research design was employed, targeting four public universities with a total workforce of 7027 non-academic staff. However, a sample of 378 non-academic staff was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using mean and standard deviation for descriptive statistics, and multiple regression and correlation analysis for inferential statistics. The findings indicated that all four leadership styles positively and significantly influenced employee performance in the selected public universities. Specifically, democratic leadership was found to foster a culture of creativity and flexibility, allowing for the adaptation of innovative ideas and changes. Autocratic leadership was effective in situations requiring high expertise and understanding. Transformational leadership improved employee engagement, productivity, and goal achievement. Transactional leadership promoted fairness, as feedback was based on objective measures rather than subjective judgments. The study concluded that different leadership styles have distinct impacts on employee performance. Democratic leaders should encourage active participation, ensuring all team members feel comfortable with the process. Caution is advised when using autocratic leadership to avoid diminishing worker well-being. Transformational leaders can motivate employees through both external incentives and

internal motivators. Transactional leaders should exhibit empathy and consider multiple perspectives in their decision-making. The study recommends that university leadership promote participative and inclusive practices, carefully apply autocratic leadership, when necessary, use transformational leadership to inspire and engage employees, and ensure fairness and empathy in transactional leadership approaches.

Keywords: Diversity, Leadership Styles, Employee Performance, Autocratic Leadership, Public Universities

Introduction

The study of "Leadership Styles and Employees Performance in Selected Public Universities in Kenya" is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, leadership in management and organizational development has been extensively explored, yet there remains a significant gap in understanding its dynamics within higher learning institutions in Africa, particularly in Kenya. As higher education undergoes transformative shifts driven by political, economic, technical, and cultural factors, effective leadership becomes crucial in navigating these changes. Employee engagement, a key driver of performance and productivity across industries, is increasingly recognized as essential for organizational success in academia. Anitha's (2014) assertion on the positive impact of engagement has sparked academic debate, highlighting its relevance in today's financial landscape where leaders prioritize high-performing individuals to foster development. Furthermore, the influence of leadership on employee commitment, as highlighted by Walumbwa et al (2008), underscores the need to delve deeper into how different leadership styles affect employee performance and organizational effectiveness. Effective leaders are instrumental in inspiring engagement, as seen in Wabomba et al.'s (2022) findings, where employee delegation was shown to enhance organizational efficiency. This relationship between leadership and employee well-being, satisfaction, and engagement is critical for maintaining strong team dynamics and achieving mutual goals.

Public universities in Kenya face numerous challenges, including insufficient funding, staff shortages, and inadequate infrastructure, which impede service delivery and affect the quality of education and graduate employability. Addressing these issues requires innovative leadership and effective human resource management (HRM) practices to enhance organizational performance and learning. The integration of diverse leadership styles—democratic, authoritarian, transformational, and transactional—can cater to varying organizational contexts and goals, ultimately boosting employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. Therefore, studying leadership styles and their impact on employee performance in Kenyan public universities is essential for several reasons. It provides insights into improving management practices in a sector critical to national development, helps address persistent challenges within these institutions, and supports the creation of a conducive environment for academic excellence and innovation. This research can inform policies and strategies that enhance organizational sustainability and progress, ensuring that public universities fulfill their mandate effectively and contribute to the broader socio-economic goals of the nation.

Private and public educational institutions worldwide face challenges including subpar academic performance, limited research output, and staff commitment issues. Transformation in the higher education sector is influenced by volatile government policies, external factors, and competitive challenges. Implementation of effective HRM practices is crucial for organizational learning and performance. Public universities in Turkey are adopting

annual performance review systems, but inefficiencies persist, hindering human capital development. Nigerian universities are adapting to globalization through improved employee productivity and organizational learning. In Kenya, the higher education sector is undergoing significant transformation driven by political, economic, technical, and cultural factors. Challenges include insufficient infrastructure, staffing, finance, and research productivity, leading to talent loss. To address these issues, comprehensive strategies integrating institutional variables and worker empowerment are necessary. Employee performance evaluation is vital for organizations, as it determines the efficiency and success of workers in fulfilling their duties. Performance is assessed based on various indicators like productivity, efficiency, quality, and profitability. The efficacy of employees is crucial for organizational longevity, as asserted by Kabiru and Bula. Anitha emphasizes the importance of systematic assessment for managerial decision-making and its impact on leadership sustainability and employee alignment. Improving workers' performance involves focusing on factors like satisfaction, management standards, and training opportunities, as highlighted by Senen, Sumiyati, and Masharyono. Maley, Dabic, and Moeller stress the correlation between employee performance and organizational goals, emphasizing the need for improvement. The evaluation criteria include target achievement, high-quality work, and overall effectiveness. Organizational success hinges on employees meeting or exceeding expectations, making it imperative to address various factors that contribute to performance enhancement.

Public universities in Kenya are currently facing two major challenges: insufficient funding from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and a shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff necessary to provide essential services (Magutu et al., 2018). These issues have led to constraints in service delivery within the university setting, including staff strikes and inadequate physical facilities such as dormitories, lecture halls, and recreational areas (CUE, 2018). Additionally, the lack of immediate employment opportunities for graduates can be linked to a decline in the quality-of-service provision in public universities. Therefore, it is crucial for the management of these institutions to reconsider the factors that contribute to quality management in order to improve overall performance (FKE, 2019). CUE (2018) emphasizes the need for innovative approaches rather than traditional linear models to address the issue of service delivery at public universities in Kenya. UNESCO (2016) also expresses concerns about the quality-of-service delivery in universities, underscoring the importance of conducting research in this area. Despite the government's efforts to provide high-quality higher education services, public institutions have consistently underperformed over the years.

Leadership styles encompass various methods through which leaders exert influence, motivation, and direction over their followers. These styles are shaped by leaders' implementation of plans and strategies to achieve specific objectives while considering stakeholders' expectations and team welfare. Wang et al (2020) suggest that leadership efficacy depends largely on the adopted style, urging leaders to discern whether situations require an authoritative or cooperative approach. Investigated styles include democratic, authoritarian, transformational, and transactional leadership. Democratic leaders promote open dialogue, inclusion in decision-making, and creativity among workers, fostering an environment conducive to growth (Bhatti et al., 2017; Choi, 2021). Autocratic leaders, in contrast, exercise direct control, making decisions without seeking input, aiming for efficient goal achievement (Akor, 2019; Rast et al., 2021). Transformational leaders inspire employees, encourage creativity, and facilitate organizational change through accountability and independence (Anderson, 2017; Alqatawenh, 2020). Transactional leadership relies on

incentives and punishments to guide subordinates, emphasizing structure, organization, and performance (Purwanto et al., 2020; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2021). Each style has its advantages and suitability depending on the organizational context and goals.

Public universities in Kenya are grappling with financial constraints from the Ministry of Education and a shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff, hindering essential services. Insufficient infrastructure like dorms and lecture halls, compounded by staff strikes, further restricts service delivery (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2021). This situation affects graduates' employment prospects and undermines the quality of education. Stakeholders, including the government, must address these challenges to prevent disruptions and achieve the 2030 vision. Enhanced tactics are needed to meet sustainable growth targets. Public universities have adopted ISO standards to improve resource utilization and customer satisfaction, leading to revenue growth and innovation. They face various ranking methodologies, emphasizing research output and ICT integration. Adapting to economic and policy changes, universities prioritize research, outreach, and extension activities while navigating their environment to fulfill their mandates effectively.

In Kenya, Public Universities were established by an Act of Parliament to conduct research using their diverse faculty across academic fields. Research, outreach, and extension activities are fundamental objectives, guiding the universities' goals and evaluation criteria (Otolo et al., 2024). Public universities, like other government institutions, are influenced by their environment and have undergone significant transformations to adapt to liberation, economic changes, and new policies. They are subject to various ranking methodologies, focusing on research output, student enrollment, graduation rates, and ICT integration. Embracing ISO 9001 concepts, they implement practices to enhance resource utilization and customer satisfaction, leading to revenue and market share growth. They prioritize innovation and effective decision-making based on thorough examination of facts.

Statement of the Problem

Kaberia et al (2024) notes that universities play a crucial role in societal development by integrating social and economic processes, relying heavily on the proficiency of faculty members. Worker performance significantly impacts university development and societal well-being. Challenges faced by public universities in Kenya include managing a diverse workforce, aligning diversity practices with organizational goals, and addressing ethnic, cultural, and generational differences. Effective human resource management entails understanding leadership styles to enhance employee performance (Otolo et al., 2024).

Regardless of the efforts put forth by universities to ensure that its employees are completely satisfied with their jobs by implementing leadership styles such as democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership, the university continues to face issues with employee performance. For instance, in the year 2019, several employees left the universities (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2021). In year (2020) saw a rise in the number of departing workers, reaching six. The years 2021 to 2022 the number of employees of who left the organization ranged from 7 to 10. This evidenced that there is need for the organization to effectively implement leadership styles on employee performance.

Engda (2018) investigated leadership styles' impact on employee performance in college settings, finding democratic leadership was uncommon compared to authoritative, with no laissez-faire style. However, the study focused solely on public educational institutions in the Kaffa Zone, potentially limiting generalizability. Otieno and Njoroge (2019) examined

leadership styles at TUK, finding transformational and transactional styles prevalent, while autocratic was least used. However, this study was limited to the Technical University of Kenya.

In a study conducted by Osano (2022), the impact of leadership style on employees' performance was examined. The outcomes discovered that the use of a transformational leadership style had a noteworthy and favorable effect on employee performance. Nevertheless, the research focused on the analysis of membership associations in Kenya. Thus, the main objective of this research was to ascertain the impact of different leadership styles on the performance of employees within a specific group of Public Universities in Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following specific objectives

- i. Examine the influence of democratic leadership style on employees' performance in public Universities in Kenya,
- ii. Establish the influence of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance in public Universities in Kenya,
- iii. Analyse the influence of transformational leadership style on employees' performance in public Universities in Kenya.
- iv. Evaluate the effect of transactional leadership style on employees' performance in public Universities in Kenya

Review of Literature

This study presents a summary of both theoretical and empirical literature reviews, as well as identifies areas where further research is needed.

Theoretical Review

This study explores several theories that were used to guide the research, including the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, Human Capital theory, and Contingency theory.

The Resource Based View (RBV) theory, initially proposed by Penrose in 1959, offers a framework for effectively managing organizational resources, diversification strategies, and production capacities. Penrose's groundbreaking work conceptualized companies as cohesive collections of resources aimed at achieving organizational goals and strategic objectives. In her theory, managers play a crucial role in identifying and pursuing production opportunities, adapting resources to dynamic environments, and leveraging superior production capabilities for superior returns. RBV emphasizes an internal perspective, focusing on organizational resources rather than external factors, in understanding performance and competitive advantage. These resources encompass a wide range of assets, skills, and knowledge under the organization's control, strategically utilized to enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness through strategy formulation and implementation. According to Barney (1991), Acedo, Barroso, and Galan (2018), company resources can originate internally, such as R&D, logistics, and brand management, or externally, including supplier roles and technological change. Categorically, resources can be physical, human, or organizational, all contributing to employee performance enhancement. Therefore, RBV theory holds significance in aiding organizations to identify their internal resources and leverage them for improved performance.

Grounded in the macroeconomic development theory proposed by Schultz (1993), Human Capital Theory, as advocated by Becker (2009), asserts that an individual's traits are closely

ties to their productivity, making productive individuals' valuable assets for organizational efficiency. Singh, Terjesen, and Vinnicombe (2008) emphasize that men and women bring unique human resources, such as knowledge and experiences, which, when combined through diversity, can lead to competitive advantages, especially evident in educational and professional settings. Gender diversity in leadership roles and risk-taking ventures underscores the potential for improved team performance through diverse skills, experiences, and behaviors. This theory is relevant to research as it posits that an organization's competitive advantage stems from the core competencies, skills, knowledge, and abilities of its personnel. Emphasis is placed on resource allocation, human resource development, and reward-related practices. Organizations strive to maximize their staff's potential not only to achieve corporate goals but also to ensure long-term viability and continuity. In rapidly evolving and complex environments, businesses must invest resources in developing their staff's experiences, skills, and capacities to maintain operational efficiency. Fiedler (1964) proposed the Contingency Theory, which suggests that successful strategy execution depends on the alignment between a leader's ability and situational factors. This includes the leader's competencies, style, attitude, and the competence of staff. Leaders should choose a style that suits the situation and enhances employee performance. Kerr, Schriesheim, Murphy, and Stogdill (2017) assert that success hinges on the match between leadership style and context. However, Peters, Hartke, and Pohlmann (2015) note the model's inflexibility, lacking acknowledgment of leaders' ability to adapt. To improve managerial effectiveness, leaders must assess each situation and adjust their style accordingly. This theory is significant as it emphasizes leaders' role in guiding and empowering employees to improve performance and maintain quality throughout projects. Providing essential support to team members is crucial, and applying clear leadership standards cultivates core values and maturity in roles, facilitating effective strategy execution for organizational performance enhancement.

Empirical Review

This study provides a thorough summary of previous research conducted on the variables under study, namely democratic, autocratic, and transformational leadership styles.

Madegwa and Muathe (2016); Wachira (2018) explored the impact of democratic leadership on employee performance in Kenyan Commercial State Corporations using a cross-sectional research design with 35,729 middle-level employees from 20 parastatals. Stratified sampling selected 384 respondents who completed structured questionnaires. Analysis via descriptive statistics revealed a significant positive correlation between democratic leadership and worker performance, albeit with a noted methodological limitation due to the survey approach. Similarly, Andrysyah et al (2020) investigated the influence of democratic leadership on employees' performance at PT. Medan Industry Area, finding a statistically significant impact through questionnaire administration and subsequent descriptive and inferential analysis, but recognizing a contextual gap within their focus on a specific company. Aisha's (2022) study on democratic leadership's effect on worker performance in a tax appeal tribunal employed a descriptive design with a cross-sectional component involving all relevant stakeholders. Results indicated a positive association between democratic leadership and employee success, yet the study's context, limited to the tax appeal tribunal, poses a contextual limitation.

Kalu and Okpokwasili (2018) investigated the impact of autocratic leadership on job performance in university libraries in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, using a survey-

based approach. Participants included 74 staff members, and data was collected through questionnaires, analyzed using frequency and mean. Results indicated that the autocratic style fosters dependence and reluctance in subordinates, negatively affecting staff performance, though the study's methodological limitation lies in its survey-based design. Anyango (2019) studied autocratic leadership's influence on performance in Boa Kenya Limited using a cross-sectional descriptive survey with 300 questionnaires, 80 of which were analyzed. Findings revealed a predominant authoritarian style within the bank, yet the study's focus on one organization highlights a contextual gap. Ojeleke (2020) examined the impact of autocratic leadership on organizational performance through a descriptive survey in the Mushin Local Government Education Authority in Lagos. Chi-square analysis indicated a favorable influence of autocratic leadership on employee performance, but the study's limitation lies in its narrow focus on a specific scenario in Nigeria's educational institutes.

Fatma and Aini (2018) investigated the influence of transformational leadership on job performance among construction personnel in Oman's Technical Colleges, with a sample of 175 participants. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using Smart PLS software, revealing a positive correlation between transformational leadership, staff training, and work performance, albeit with a contextual gap due to the study's temporal focus from 2014 to 2017. Rafia and Achmad (2020) explored the impact of transformational leadership on employee performance, considering work satisfaction and engagement as mediating factors, using quantitative research with 77 participants from the Department of Public Housing and Settlement Areas in Central Java Province. While no direct impact was found, transformational leadership significantly influenced work satisfaction and engagement, yet the study's contextual deficiency lies in its narrow focus on civil servants. Wiandhani, Jimad, and Erlina (2022) investigated the impact of transformational leadership on employees' performance with work motivation as a mediator, focusing on car rental service organizations in Lampung Province, encompassing 378 individuals. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS software indicated a significant positive impact of transformational leadership on performance, yet the research was confined to the specific context of automobile rental services in Lampung.

Kabiru and Bula (2020) investigated the impact of transactional leadership on employee performance within financial institutions in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Their study employed a descriptive survey approach, sampling 242 participants, comprising managers and support staff from various commercial banks, including KCB, Coop Bank, Equity Bank, and Family Bank, selected through proportional stratified sampling. Questionnaires were used for data collection, and analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between transactional leadership and employee performance. Adriansyah, Setiawan, and Yuniarinto (2020) explored the influence of transactional leadership and organizational culture on job performance, mediated by work motivation, using a sample of 91 individuals chosen via random sampling. Path Analysis indicated a direct impact of both leadership style and culture on performance and motivation, with motivation acting as an intermediary. However, the study's methodology, employing a basic random sample, presents a potential limitation. Maundu et al (2020) aimed to assess the effect of transactional leadership on employee engagement, surveying 3,860 instructors from 306 Public Secondary Schools using systematic random sampling. Their analysis showed a significant positive association between transactional leadership and employee engagement, suggesting its potential to enhance engagement. Nevertheless, the study's reliance on a survey design poses a methodological limitation.

The 21st century has brought about increased complexity and challenges in leadership, leaving organizations uncertain about which approach to choose. Every organization prefers a leadership style that fits its unique circumstances, influenced by internal and external factors. Public institutions are increasingly focusing on equality and participatory democracy, rejecting studies centered on individual subjects. Research shows that the link between leadership styles and organizational success varies based on specific factors used by researchers. Gaps in study settings, themes, and methodologies call for new investigations to establish a clear connection between leadership and non-academic personnel performance at universities. Different perspectives lead institutions to adopt strategies that work best for them.

Research Methodology

The research employed a descriptive research approach, as defined by Thomas (2011) as a methodology focused on collecting data or information about specific units or observations while maintaining an unaffected environment. This approach was chosen to observe and document the variable of interest in its natural setting without alteration. Descriptive research involves observing subjects or participants within their natural surroundings, allowing for the collection of comprehensive information, which may be either quantitative or qualitative, similar approach was used by Muathe (2010).

The study focused on four selected public universities in Kenya: UoN, TUK, KU, and Cooperative University of Kenya, specifically at their main campuses, to access relevant employment data for the entire selected public university and fraternity sites. The target population comprised 7027 non-academic employees. The research employed a stratified sampling approach to ensure comprehensive representation of all instances within the target audience. Simple random sampling was used to select participants for the sample, ensuring equal opportunity for each individual. Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size calculation was used, with a margin of error of 5%. The study's sample size was determined to be 212 participants, accounting for 5.4% of the total population under investigation.

The study will utilize the construct validity approach, as suggested by Shore and Tetrick (2009), to establish the link between the measuring instrument and the overarching theoretical framework. This aims to determine whether the instrument aligns with the ideas and theoretical assumptions. Face validity, on the other hand, involves assessing whether the chosen measurement technique accurately represents a specific variable or concept in a research study. Content validity of the instruments was ensured by making sure they were clear and expressed in straightforward language. The researcher employed precise and understandable language when formulating the questions, using terminology expected to be familiar and understandable to the participants.

Questionnaires were used to collect primary data. The survey comprised six sections: respondent's background, democratic leadership styles, autocratic leadership styles, transformational leadership styles, transactional leadership styles, and employee performance. Likert scale questions were employed to gauge respondents' agreement or disagreement with specific research variables. The research began by obtaining permission from the administrators of each institution to conduct the study. This involved articulating the study's purpose, its relevance to the organization, and the expected level of cooperation from the management. Self-administered questionnaires were then distributed to each respondent, who completed them independently. The questionnaires were collected three

weeks later, with participants notified in advance of the collection day, and a follow-up visit was conducted by the researcher one week later to provide a reminder.

Before analyzing the results, filled-out questionnaires underwent a review process to ensure their comprehensiveness and coherence (Muathe, 2010). Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, focusing on measures such as mean and standard deviation. Data was presented using tables and figures generated by SPSS software version 20.0. Inferential statistics involved correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis.

Research Findings and Discussion

Response Rate

The response rate obtained in this study was based on a sample size of 378 respondents.

Table 1

Response Rate

| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Response | 370 | 97.9 |
| Non response | 8 | 2.1 |
| Total | 378 | 100 |

Table 1 shows that out of the 378 questionnaires distributed to participants, 370 were returned, yielding a response rate of 97.9%. Conversely, 8 questionnaires were not received, resulting in a no-response rate of 2.1%. According to Baruch & Holtom (2014), a response rate of 80% or higher is deemed adequate for data analysis. Therefore, the study's response rate of 97.9% was considered suitable. This high response rate enhances the credibility and validity of the research findings.

The demographic characteristic was analyzed on the basis of the respondents' gender, age bracket, educational level and professional expertise.

The study revealed that the majority of participants were male, making up 54.3% of the total, while female respondents constituted 45.7%. Including respondents' gender was crucial to ensure accurate representation of both males and females in the research.

The results indicate that the largest proportion of respondents fell within the age range of 40 to 49, making up 50.0% of the total. Those aged between 30 and 39 represented 26.2% of the respondents, while individuals below 29 years accounted for 18.1%. Moreover, 5.7% of participants were aged 50 years and above. These findings suggest that the research had a balanced representation of participants across various age groups.

The study reveals that the majority of participants (41.1%) had attained a degree-level education, followed by 29.2% with a diploma, 27.1% with a Master's degree, and 2.7% with a postgraduate diploma. This suggests that a significant portion of the institution's employees had achieved a high level of education. The findings demonstrate that the majority of participants (45.7%) had a professional background ranging from 10 to 15 years. Additionally, 25.7% had more than 15 years of experience, 24.1% had between 5 to 9 years of experience, and 4.6% had fewer than 5 years of experience. This indicates that the respondents had a diverse range of job experience, providing the researcher with relevant data.

The descriptive analysis results for the quantitative data obtained using SPSS were presented using descriptive statistics, specifically the Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD).

The study investigated the impact of democratic leadership style on employees' performance in public universities in Kenya, finding a significant influence with a mean score of 4.36 and

standard deviation of 0.64. These results align with previous research by Wachira (2018) in Kenyan parastatals. The study suggests a positive correlation between democratic leadership and worker performance, with participants strongly agreeing that democratic leaders prioritize teamwork ($M=4.58$, $SD=0.42$), morals ($M=4.55$, $SD=0.45$), and inclusion in decision-making ($M=4.50$, $SD=0.50$). This finding is consistent with Bhatti et al (2017), who emphasize the openness and empowerment associated with democratic leadership. Additionally, respondents agreed that democratic leadership encourages active engagement in problem-solving ($M=4.12$, $SD=0.88$) and assures consideration of diverse perspectives ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.95$), supporting Choi's (2021) view that such leadership fosters an environment conducive to open dialogue, goal-setting, and staff growth. In summary, democratic leadership in public universities promotes teamwork, morality, inclusivity, problem-solving, and creativity among employees.

The study aimed to explore the influence of autocratic leadership style on employees' performance in public universities in Kenya, revealing that participants agreed on its impact with a mean score of 4.11 and standard deviation of 0.89. These findings align with research by Anyango (2019) in Boa Kenya Limited, indicating that autocratic leadership is prevalent in the organization. Respondents strongly agreed that an effective autocratic leader enhances staff productivity by understanding organizational dynamics ($M=4.84$, $SD=0.16$), and allowing personnel to focus on assigned responsibilities ($M=4.50$, $SD=0.50$), consistent with Akor (2019). Additionally, they agreed on the establishment of clear objectives and hierarchy ($M=4.04$, $SD=0.96$), echoing Rast et al (2021), who note autocratic leaders tend to make decisions independently. However, they were neutral regarding decision speed ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.77$), contrasting Ojeleke's (2020) findings that autocratic leadership expedites decision-making. Overall, the study suggests that autocratic leadership in public universities may enhance productivity through clear direction but might not always expedite decision-making processes.

The study investigated the influence of transformational leadership style on employees' performance in public universities in Kenya, revealing a positive impact with a mean score of 4.26 and standard deviation of 0.74. These findings are consistent with Fatma and Aini (2018), affirming a favorable link between transformational leadership and staff training. Respondents strongly agreed that transformational leaders motivate career advancement and professional development ($M=4.75$, $SD=0.25$), echoing Anderson (2017), who emphasizes inspiring employees to participate in creative practices. They also agreed that motivation is essential to achieving goals under transformational leadership ($M=4.65$, $SD=0.25$). Additionally, they acknowledged that a clear project vision enhances dedication and motivation ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.72$), and that transformational leaders encourage focus on organizational goals ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.95$), supporting Alqatawenh's (2020) view on the role of transformational leadership in stimulating employee motivation and adaptation to change. Although respondents indicated a slightly lower agreement regarding a sense of value and belonging within the organization ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.42$), overall, the study suggests that transformational leadership fosters motivation, skill development, and goal alignment among employees in public universities.

The study examined the influence of transactional leadership style on employees' performance in public universities in Kenya, revealing a positive impact with a mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.82. This aligns with Kabiru and Bula's (2020) findings in financial institutions in Nairobi City County, showing a significant favorable link between transactional leadership and employee performance. Respondents strongly agreed that

under transactional leadership, employees are motivated by clear goals and deadlines for rewards ($M=4.63$, $SD=0.57$), and establishing observable goals encourages optimal performance ($M=4.52$, $SD=0.48$), consistent with (Purwanto et al., 2020). They also agreed that pursuing company objectives enhances organizational impact ($M=4.44$, $SD=0.56$), and well-defined roles and hierarchies ensure clarity in reporting structures ($M=3.87$, $SD=1.13$), echoing (Odumeru and Ogbonna, 2021). However, they were neutral regarding the objectivity of feedback within transactional leadership ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.57$), contrasting Adriansyah, Setiawan, and Yuniarinto's (2020) findings that work motivation mediates job performance and organizational culture under transactional leadership. Overall, the study suggests that transactional leadership in public universities fosters goal clarity and organizational impact, though feedback objectivity may vary.

The study investigated employees' performance in public universities in Kenya, revealing that leadership styles significantly influence performance with a mean score of 4.19 and standard deviation of 0.81. Kabiru and Bula (2020) emphasize that employees are crucial assets to any organization, and their performance directly impacts overall efficiency and success. Respondents agreed that successful leadership styles foster a culture of creativity ($M=4.42$, $SD=0.58$), facilitate goal attainment ($M=4.31$, $SD=0.69$), reduce turnover ($M=4.10$, $SD=0.90$), improve work quality ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.93$), and enhance collaboration ($M=3.94$, $SD=1.06$). Anitha (2020) defines employee performance as the systematic assessment of individuals' work, which correlates with effective leadership for sustainable outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of leadership in promoting employee creativity, goal achievement, retention, and overall organizational success in public universities in Kenya.

The research investigated the impact of autocratic leadership style on employee performance in public universities in Kenya, revealing that participants agreed that this style significantly influenced performance, with a mean score of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.89. This finding aligns with Anyango's (2019) study on autocratic leadership in Boa Kenya Limited, where it was found to be the predominant style. Respondents strongly agreed that effective autocratic leaders understand organizational dynamics, enhancing staff productivity ($M=4.84$, $SD=0.16$), and that employees can focus on their assigned responsibilities without the burden of decision-making ($M=4.50$, $SD=0.50$). This is consistent with Akor's (2019) definition of autocratic leadership, where decisions are made without consultation. Additionally, they agreed that clear objectives and leadership create a structured environment ($M=4.04$, $SD=0.96$), and organizational goals are achieved due to limited involvement in decision-making ($M=3.94$, $SD=1.068$), echoing Rast et al (2021) view. However, respondents were neutral regarding the statement that decision-making is expedited due to lack of consensus ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.77$), contradicting Ojeleke's (2020) findings of favorable effects of autocratic leadership on organizational performance.

Inferential statistics were computed by employing regression analysis and correlation analysis methods. The correlation analysis reveals strong positive correlations between leadership styles and employee performance. Democratic leadership style shows a Pearson's r value of 0.778, indicating a strong correlation, consistent with Aisha's (2022) findings on tax appeal tribunal workers. Autocratic leadership style also demonstrates a very strong correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.801$), aligning with Anyango's (2019) study in Boa Kenya Limited. Transformational leadership style exhibits a Pearson's r value of 0.766, indicating a very strong correlation, in line with Wiandhani et al.'s (2022) research on work motivation mediation. Similarly, transactional leadership style displays a very strong correlation (Pearson's $r = 0.795$), as supported by Maundu, Namusonge and Simiyu's (2020) study on

employee engagement. These findings suggest that different leadership styles significantly impact employee performance, with both autocratic and transactional styles demonstrating particularly strong correlations.

The following section presents the results of a regression analysis conducted to determine the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable: The summary of the model in the study indicates that the R-value was 0.885, which is close to 1, indicating a strong relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The R squared value was 0.870, approaching 1, indicating that the model explains a large portion of the variability. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.856 suggests that 85.6% of the variance in employee performance can be explained by the leadership styles examined: transactional, transformational, autocratic, and democratic. This also implies a 14.4% variance attributable to other factors not included in the study.

The study examined the coefficients of different leadership styles on employee performance, finding that without their effects, performance would rise to 0.628. Democratic leadership showed a substantial 73.7% improvement, while autocratic leadership exhibited an 83.0% rise. Transformational and transactional leadership styles also positively impacted performance by 69.9% and 79.3% respectively. The regression equation formulated was: Employee performance = 0.628 + 0.737 (democratic) + 0.830 (autocratic) + 0.699 (transformational) + 0.793 (transactional). Statistical analysis revealed favorable t-values and significance levels for all leadership styles, indicating their substantial influence on performance. Democratic leadership's impact was consistent with prior research, while autocratic leadership's authority-driven decision-making aligned with its effectiveness in certain contexts. Transformational leadership encouraged innovation and motivation, whereas transactional leadership facilitated performance through structured incentives. These findings corroborated previous studies, highlighting the significant and positive correlations between leadership styles and employee performance, providing valuable insights for managerial practices and organizational success.

The data from the study suggests that if the effects of democratic, authoritarian, transformational, and transactional leadership styles were not considered, employee performance would increase to 0.628. The research indicates that a one-unit increase in democratic leadership style leads to a significant 73.7% improvement in employee performance. Similarly, a one-unit increase in autocratic leadership style results in an 83.0% rise in employee performance. A shift towards transformational leadership style would lead to a 69.9% improvement, while a shift towards transactional leadership style would result in a 79.3% rise in employee performance. This is represented by the following regression equation: Employee performance = 0.628 + 0.737 (democratic leadership style) + 0.830 (autocratic leadership style) + 0.699 (transformational leadership style) + 0.793 (transactional leadership style) The data the study shows that the t-value for democratic leadership style is 3.149, with a significance value of 0.001, suggesting a substantial and beneficial impact on employee performance. This finding is consistent with Wachira's (2018) research on democratic leadership style in Commercial State-owned enterprises in Kenya, which found a strong correlation between this style and worker performance.

Similarly, the autocratic leadership style has a positive and significant influence on employee performance, with a t-value of 8.218 and a significance level of 0.001. This aligns with the assertion by Rast et al (2021) that autocratic leaders often assume full decision-making authority, which can be advantageous in situations requiring prompt decision-making. The transformational leadership style also has a strong and meaningful impact on employee

performance, as indicated by a t-value of 2.074 and a significance level of 0.000. Anderson (2017) suggests that this style motivates people to engage in innovative practices, contributing to future achievements of the company. Lastly, the transactional leadership style demonstrates a strong and statistically significant impact on employee performance, with a t-value of 2.074 and a significance level of 0.000. This is in line with the findings of Kabiru and Bula (2020), who studied the influence of transactional leadership style on workers' performance in financial institutions in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Their research revealed a positive correlation between transactional leadership style and employee performance.

Participants in a study on the impact of leadership styles on worker performance in Kenyan public universities highlighted the effects of democratic and autocratic leadership. Democratic leaders were praised for their transparent approach, fostering open dialogue, and empowering workers in decision-making and goal-setting processes. They actively sought and valued employee feedback, encouraging participation and innovation while instilling confidence and autonomy in staff. In contrast, autocratic leaders were noted for providing clear organizational structure and communication channels, making prompt decisions, and offering explicit instructions and supervision. While this style may enhance efficiency and reduce stress, it can also limit employee autonomy and creativity. However, it was acknowledged that autocratic leadership can be beneficial for inexperienced teams by providing guidance and facilitating goal achievement that they might struggle with independently.

Participants were asked to evaluate the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on employee performance in Kenyan public universities. Transformational leadership was lauded for its ability to inspire a positive vision of the future, understand employees' needs, stimulate creativity, and foster teamwork. Employees under this style developed skills to handle various tasks, boosting productivity by enhancing their self-efficacy. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, was described as a structured approach with clear expectations, rewards, and consequences. It effectively communicated staff obligations and performance standards, minimizing personal bias. In departments led by transactional leaders, clear duties and hierarchy reduced ambiguity, allowing employees to focus on tasks rather than navigating organizational structures. While transformational leadership aligned individual goals with organizational objectives, transactional leadership emphasized adherence to established frameworks for improved efficiency.

The effect of transactional leadership on employee performance in Kenyan public universities was explored. Participants noted transactional leadership as an organized style with clear expectations, rewards, and consequences. Its implementation effectively communicates staff obligations and performance consequences. This leadership approach aims for impartial assessment of work, minimizing personal biases. Departments led by transactional leaders have clear duties and hierarchy, facilitating efficient work by clarifying superiors and avenues for inquiries. This structured environment enables employees to focus on meeting objectives rather than navigating ambiguity.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the effectiveness of democratic leadership in fostering creativity and flexibility among staff, emphasizing active participation and openness in decision-making processes, which enhances staff admiration and confidence. Inclusion in decision-making cultivates a sense of value among workers, leading to improved efficiency and reduced attrition. Conversely, autocratic leadership proves beneficial in expertise-driven scenarios,

facilitating quick decision-making, enhanced efficiency, and stress reduction. Individual decision-makers in this style can strategize and rectify teams more efficiently, promoting work excellence. Autocratic leadership also fosters increased team psychological safety, enhancing overall performance.

The study aimed to investigate the impact of different leadership styles on employees' performance in selected public universities in Kenya. Four leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, transformational, and transactional—were examined through questionnaire-based data collection and statistical analysis. Democratic leadership was found to have a positive influence on performance, as it emphasized collaboration and moral values, enhancing decision-making and team participation. Autocratic leadership showed a positive impact, with leaders understanding organizational dynamics and setting clear objectives, thus improving staff productivity and accountability. Transformational leadership positively influenced performance by motivating staff to develop new skills and fostering commitment through a clear project vision. Transactional leadership also improved performance by setting clear goals and rewards, motivating employees to contribute to organizational growth. Overall, the study highlights the importance of leadership styles in shaping employee performance in public universities in Kenya, with each style contributing differently to productivity and motivation.

The research highlighted the effectiveness of transformational leadership in promoting employee engagement, efficiency, and empowerment within teams. Transformational leaders prioritize both present duties and long-term company goals, inspiring individuals to excel and align their efforts with organizational objectives. This leadership style involves setting a clear vision and goals, fostering growth among professionals, and encouraging them to embrace challenges for career advancement. On the other hand, transactional leadership emphasizes equity through impartial feedback based on objective measurements, ensuring all workers are evaluated and compensated equally. Employees understand the specific objectives and deadlines required for rewards and the consequences of failing to meet them, fostering a clear understanding of their impact on the company's growth.

Policy Recommendations

The study suggests that for democratic leadership to be effective, leaders must encourage active participation from all team members, ensuring everyone feels comfortable with the process. It's crucial for leaders to communicate that all perspectives are valued, regardless of differences. Clear communication skills, including expressing thoughts and listening actively, are essential for positive collaboration. Before open discussions, establishing guidelines and addressing any uncertainties is important. Overall, leadership should promote participation, value diverse viewpoints, and foster effective communication to enhance teamwork.

The research advises managers to be cautious in using autocratic leadership styles, as they can harm workers' well-being. A crucial aspect is the redistribution of responsibilities within the team. To adapt, create a new workflow that prioritizes tasks and ensures all are accomplished. Establish a clear chain of command so the team can function even when you're unavailable. Lead a strategic meeting to discuss these changes, supporting employees as they adjust and understanding how it impacts their workflow. This approach ensures effective management while mitigating the negative effects of autocratic leadership.

The research suggests that leaders can motivate people through transformational leadership, which involves both external incentives like bonuses and internal motivators. Transformational leaders need attributes such as clarity, creativity, honesty, and integrity. To

maintain integrity, they must treat all workers fairly, promote honesty, engage in self-evaluation, and encourage open communication. Setting clear objectives that align with the business's vision is crucial. Transactional leaders, on the other hand, should show empathy and consider multiple viewpoints. They should foster innovation by seeking growth and allowing workers autonomy. Decisions should align with the organization's ethics, and communication should be transparent, sharing both successes and setbacks. Positive, ongoing feedback should focus on improvement without dwelling on weaknesses, and errors should be seen as opportunities for growth.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

The study has certain limitations. Participants may have been hesitant to provide information, which could have limited the scope of the research. However, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their information as their personal identities were not revealed, and the data was not shared with any other parties. Additionally, participants within the organization had busy work schedules, potentially affecting the effectiveness of data collection. Surveys were distributed to participants via online platforms like Google Forms, allowing them to answer questions at their convenience and facilitating the prompt return of completed questionnaires.

The research recommends further exploration into different leadership styles to address the 14.4% difference found in the regression results. Additionally, the study suggests conducting a similar investigation, focusing specifically on alternative higher education institutions like private colleges and universities.

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