

Moderating Effect of Organizational Culture on the Relationship between Community Empowerment and Organizational Performance of Kenya National Highways Authority, North Rift Region

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Abstract

This study sought to examine the moderating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between community empowerment and organizational performance in the Kenya National Highways Authority, North Rift Region. This study was guided by Contingency Theory. The study adopted an explanatory research design. The target population for this study was 403 employees. The sample size of the study was 201 calculated from Yamane's formulae. This study used stratified random sampling to select 201 respondents. The study collected primary data using questionnaires. Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics consisted of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics was a correlation and hierarchical moderating linear regression. The analyzed data was presented in form of tables. Findings indicated that organizational culture significantly moderate the relationships between organizational performance and community empowerment. The study concludes that organizational culture plays a critical moderating role, strengthening the relationship between these direct determinants and organizational performance by fostering collaboration, accountability, innovation, and continuous learning, thereby amplifying their combined effect on the sustainable success of road development projects. The study recommends that KeNHA systematically strengthen community empowerment, as core drivers of organizational performance, while deliberately

institutionalizing a supportive organizational culture that enhances collaboration, accountability, and inclusivity.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Organizational Performance, Community Empowerment

Introduction

Public infrastructure development remains a strategic instrument for advancing Kenya's socio-economic transformation agenda under Kenya Vision 2030, which positions transport connectivity as a catalyst for inclusive growth and regional competitiveness (World Bank, 2022). Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that infrastructure effectiveness depends not only on capital investment but also on governance quality and stakeholder integration mechanisms (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2023). In emerging economies, institutional capacity and participatory frameworks significantly influence project sustainability and public trust (Ahsan, 2024). Despite increased infrastructure spending in Kenya, regional disparities in project performance persist, suggesting the presence of contextual and organizational determinants beyond technical execution (Ndugu, 2021). These disparities necessitate a deeper examination of internal institutional dynamics shaping infrastructure outcomes.

The Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA), as the statutory agency responsible for national trunk roads, operates within a politically supervised and compliance-driven public-sector environment (Government of Kenya, 2007). In the North Rift Region, infrastructure projects intersect with complex socio-economic realities, including land tenure systems, resettlement processes, and youth employment expectations (Njoroge, 2023). Although community empowerment is embedded within public participation frameworks, implementation inconsistencies have generated concerns regarding stakeholder exclusion and delayed compensation (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2023). Recent studies suggest that such implementation gaps are frequently rooted in institutional norms and internal governance cultures that shape responsiveness and accountability (Ahsan, 2024). This perspective shifts analytical attention from policy design to organizational behavior.

Community empowerment has been empirically associated with improved organizational performance through enhanced legitimacy, reduced resistance, and strengthened stakeholder cooperation (World Bank, 2022). Contemporary governance literature conceptualizes empowerment as structured participation that redistributes decision-making influence toward affected communities (Ahsan, 2024). However, empowerment initiatives may yield differential outcomes depending on the institutional environment in which they are embedded (Ndugu, 2021). Drawing on Edgar Schein (2010), organizational culture constitutes shared assumptions and normative patterns that shape how formal policies are interpreted and enacted. In public-sector contexts characterized by bureaucratic hierarchies and regulatory rigidity, culture may either amplify participatory practices or constrain them through procedural formalism (Smollan, 2014). Consequently, culture may function not merely as a background variable but as a contingent factor influencing the empowerment-performance nexus.

Notwithstanding increasing scholarly attention to participatory governance, limited empirical research in Kenya has examined organizational culture as a moderating variable within public infrastructure agencies. Existing studies predominantly focus on private-sector organizations or generalized public administration contexts, thereby neglecting region-specific

infrastructure environments such as the North Rift (Ndugu, 2021). Institutional and stakeholder theories further posit that organizational responses to community demands are mediated by internal normative systems that determine legitimacy-seeking behavior (Freeman, 1984; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Yet empirical validation of this moderating mechanism remains underexplored in Kenya's infrastructure sector (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2023). This study therefore investigates how organizational culture moderates the relationship between community empowerment and organizational performance within KeNHA's North Rift Region, contributing to both public-sector management theory and infrastructure governance practice.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the institutionalization of community empowerment frameworks within Kenya's public infrastructure sector, improvements in organizational performance remain uneven across regions (World Bank, 2022). Contemporary public administration research emphasizes that participatory governance enhances legitimacy, accountability, and service outcomes when meaningfully implemented (Torfing et al., 2019). However, empirical evidence indicates that the relationship between stakeholder engagement and organizational performance is not uniform and often depends on internal institutional conditions (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2023). In Kenya, regional disparities in infrastructure delivery suggest that formal empowerment policies alone are insufficient to guarantee performance gains (Ndugu, 2021). This inconsistency raises a critical question within governance scholarship: under what internal conditions does community empowerment translate into measurable organizational performance?

Current debates in the social sciences increasingly focus on public value governance, which argues that public-sector performance is co-produced through collaborative relationships between institutions and stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2020). Similarly, co-creation theory posits that stakeholder inclusion strengthens institutional effectiveness only when embedded within supportive organizational systems (Torfing et al., 2019). Yet research also shows that organizational culture significantly shapes employee behavior, decision-making processes, and responsiveness to external stakeholders (Hassan & Wright, 2020). In public agencies characterized by bureaucratic rigidity or hierarchical norms, empowerment initiatives may be implemented symbolically rather than substantively, thereby limiting their performance impact (Wu et al., 2024). Although these debates highlight culture as a potential explanatory factor, empirical studies examining its moderating role in infrastructure institutions remain limited, particularly within developing country contexts (Ahsan, 2024).

Within the Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA), infrastructure projects in regions such as the North Rift involve complex stakeholder interactions related to land acquisition, compensation, and socio-economic inclusion (Njoroge, 2023). While empowerment initiatives are designed to enhance community participation, persistent concerns regarding stakeholder dissatisfaction and project delays suggest that performance outcomes may be influenced by deeper institutional dynamics (World Bank, 2022). Existing Kenyan studies have largely examined community empowerment in private-sector or generalized public contexts, without analyzing how internal cultural norms condition its effect on performance outcomes (Waheed et al., 2021). Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence explaining whether and how organizational culture strengthens or weakens the relationship between

community empowerment and organizational performance in regional public infrastructure agencies.

Failure to address this gap has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it limits the advancement of governance scholarship by neglecting the contingent mechanisms through which participatory reforms influence institutional performance (Bryson et al., 2020). Practically, it constrains policy interventions aimed at improving infrastructure delivery efficiency and stakeholder trust in high-impact regions (Ansu-Mensah et al., 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to examine how organizational culture moderates the relationship between community empowerment and organizational performance within KeNHA's North Rift Region, thereby contributing empirical evidence to ongoing debates in public value governance and participatory public management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine how organizational culture moderates the relationship between community empowerment and organizational performance at the Kenya National Highways Authority in the North Rift Region.

Theoretical Review

Contingency Theory

The study was guided by Contingency Theory developed by Fred Fiedler in 1964. Fiedler introduced this theory to explain how leadership effectiveness is influenced by situational factors. The central premise of the theory is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to leadership; instead, the effectiveness of leadership styles depends on the alignment between the leader's traits and the specific situation they are in. Contingency theory posits that organizational effectiveness is dependent on the alignment between the organization's internal characteristics and external factors or strategic initiatives (Fiedler, 1964). This theory suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and the effectiveness of organizational practices such as community empowerment will vary based on the context provided by the organization's culture.

Contingency theory is particularly suitable for studying organizational culture as a moderating variable because it focuses on how contextual factors, like culture, influence the effectiveness of different practices. In this study, organizational culture moderates how community empowerment affect organizational performance. If the culture within KeNHA is open to community empowerment and values community engagement, community empowerment efforts may have a stronger, more positive impact on performance. Conversely, a culture that is resistant to change or more profit-driven may weaken the relationship between community empowerment and performance.

Contingency theory's flexibility makes it ideal for application in public sector organizations like KeNHA, where the nature of internal culture may differ significantly from private-sector counterparts. The theory helps explore how varying organizational cultures within public sector institutions can influence how community empowerment impact organizational performance.

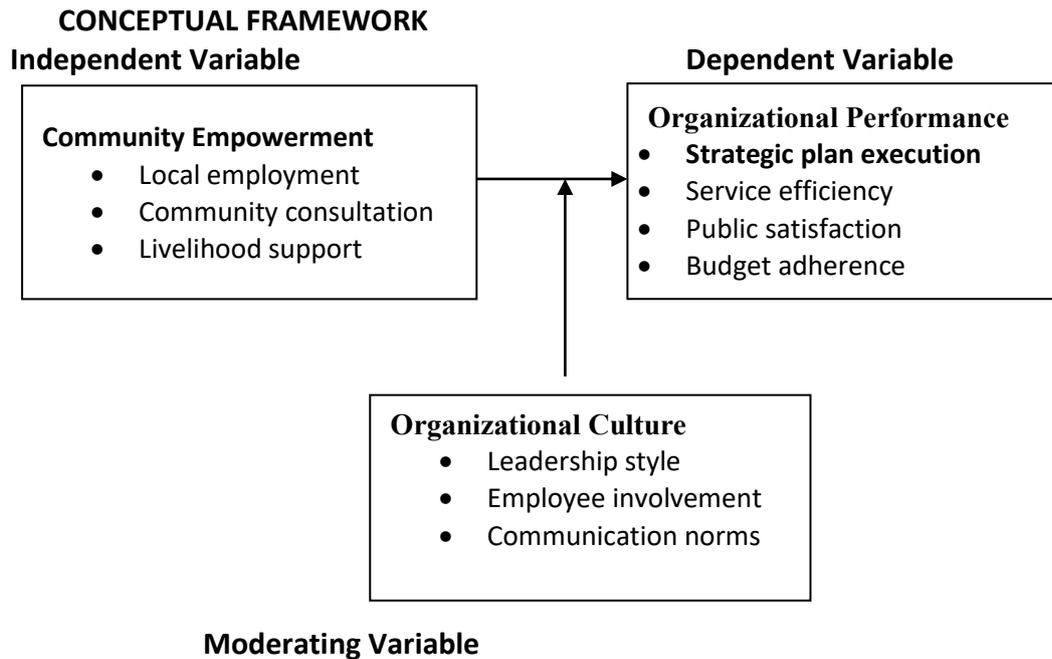


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2025)

Research Methodology

The study adopted an explanatory research design. The target population for this study were employees across various departments at the Kenya National Highways North Rift Region. In total, 403 respondents were targeted. The resulting sample size is approximately 201 respondents, which the study adopted as the final sample to ensure sufficient representation and statistical reliability. To ensure equitable representation of all counties within the North Rift Region, the study employed stratified random sampling. After data collection, the data was processed, analyzed, and presented.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics for Community Empowerment

The study sought to determine the effect of community empowerment on the organizational performance of Kenya National Highways Authority, North Rift Region as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Community Empowerment

Statement		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Stdv
1. The Kenya National Highways Authority actively involves local communities in decision-making processes related to road development and maintenance.	F	14	21	5	75	62	3.85	1.25
	%	7.9	11.9	2.8	42.4	35.0		
2. KeNHA ensures that community members are provided with adequate training to improve their skills for employment in road projects in the North Rift Region.	F	18	31	7	68	53	3.60	1.34
	%	10.2	17.5	4.0	38.4	29.9		
3. The community's feedback is effectively incorporated into KeNHA's planning and execution of road construction and rehabilitation projects.	F	19	16	6	83	53	3.76	1.27
	%	10.7	9.0	3.4	46.9	29.9		
4. KeNHA fosters collaboration between local communities and contractors to enhance local participation in road development projects.	F	16	25	3	70	63	3.79	1.31
	%	9.0	14.1	1.7	39.5	35.6		
5. KeNHA's community empowerment initiatives have led to increased local employment opportunities in road construction and maintenance projects.	F	18	22	7	72	58	3.73	1.31
	%	10.2	12.4	4.0	40.7	32.8		
6. Local communities in the North Rift Region benefit from enhanced infrastructure due to KeNHA's community empowerment programs.	F	15	16	4	78	64	3.90	1.23
	%	8.5	9.0	2.3	44.1	36.2		
7. The Kenya National Highways Authority provides platforms for community members to voice concerns or suggestions regarding road projects in the region.	F	17	22	5	74	59	3.77	1.30
	%	9.6	12.4	2.8	41.8	33.3		
8. The community is well-informed and involved in the monitoring and evaluation of road projects implemented by KeNHA in the North Rift Region.	F	17	25	6	73	56	3.71	1.31
	%	9.6	14.1	3.4	41.2	31.6		

Source: Research Data (2025)

According to Table 4.8, majority of the respondents 137(77.4%) agreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority actively involves local communities in decision-making processes related to road development and maintenance while 35(19.8%) disagreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority actively involves local communities in decision-making processes related to road development and maintenance. The mean and standard deviation also revealed that the respondents agreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority actively involves local communities in decision-making processes related to road development and maintenance ($M=3.85$; $SD=1.25$). The study findings agreed with M'arimi,

(2019) indicated that access to finance, staff competence and public participation have a strong influence in implementation of performance-based road maintenance projects.

Secondly, most of the respondents 121(68.3%) agreed that KeNHA ensures that community members are provided with adequate training to improve their skills for employment in road projects in the North Rift Region. On the other hand, 49(27.7%) disagreed that KeNHA ensures that community members are provided with adequate training to improve their skills for employment in road projects in the North Rift Region. The respondents also agreed that KeNHA ensures that community members are provided with adequate training to improve their skills for employment in road projects in the North Rift Region as indicated by a mean of (M=3.60; SD=1.34). These findings concur with Kariuki, (2015) indicate that there is a great influence of availability of resources on monitoring and evaluation of Road Infrastructural Construction. The study revealed that adequate resources ensure timely completion of construction projects together with competent project staff. Availability of monitoring and evaluation personnel influences road infrastructural construction projects.

Majority of the respondents agreed 136(76.8%) while 35(19.7%) disagreed that the community's feedback is effectively incorporated into KeNHA's planning and execution of road construction and rehabilitation projects. Additionally, the respondents also agreed that community's feedback is effectively incorporated into KeNHA's planning and execution of road construction and rehabilitation projects as indicated by a mean of (M=3.76; SD=1.27).

Also, majority of the respondents 133(75.1%) agreed that KeNHA fosters collaboration between local communities and contractors to enhance local participation in road development projects. In addition, 41(23.1%) disagreed that KeNHA fosters collaboration between local communities and contractors to enhance local participation in road development projects. However, they also agreed with mean and standard deviation of (M=3.79; SD=1.31) that KeNHA fosters collaboration between local communities and contractors to enhance local participation in road development projects. Results agreed with Kanyanja, (2024) found that leadership adoption had the strongest effect, while organizational structure had the least impact. Effective leadership practices, such as setting clear goals and implementing strategies, were found to enhance decision-making efficiency, maintain strategic momentum, boost employee morale, and increase overall productivity.

The study findings also indicate that majority of the respondents 130(73.5%) agreed that KeNHA's community empowerment initiatives have led to increased local employment opportunities in road construction and maintenance projects. Furthermore, 40(22.6%) disagreed that KeNHA's community empowerment initiatives have led to increased local employment opportunities in road construction and maintenance projects. The respondents also agreed that KeNHA's community empowerment initiatives have led to increased local employment opportunities in road construction and maintenance projects, with mean and standard deviation of (M=3.73; SD=1.31). These findings are consistent with the study done by Khanani, Adugbila, Martinez and Pfeffer, (2021) show that road infrastructure projects scaled up residential development, both in Kisumu and Accra, as the roads contributed to housing rents and land prices to increase and rendered peri-urban communities along them as attractive zones for real estate developers.

Additionally, majority of the respondents 142(80.3%) agreed that local communities in the North Rift Region benefit from enhanced infrastructure due to KeNHA's community empowerment programs. Additionally, 31(17.5%) disagreed that local communities in the North Rift Region benefit from enhanced infrastructure due to KeNHA's community empowerment programs. However, they also agreed in terms of mean and standard deviation that that local communities in the North Rift Region benefit from enhanced infrastructure due to KeNHA's community empowerment programs ($M=3.90$; $SD=1.23$). Results are consistent with Otieno, (2016) established that conflict mitigating and peace initiatives that have been employed in the North Rift inter alia tracking and arresting of perpetrators of conflicts by the government, creation and activation of community security and vigilante groups, strengthening of elders courts to arbitrate over conflict cases, recovery of stolen animals, introduction of alternative livelihoods, use of traditional early warning systems, inter community peace dialogues, peace committees, and inter community common grazing patterns.

Further, study findings indicate that 133(75.1%) of the respondents agreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority provides platforms for community members to voice concerns or suggestions regarding road projects in the region. However, 39(22.0%) disagreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority provides platforms for community members to voice concerns or suggestions regarding road projects in the region. In terms of mean and standard deviation, the respondents agreed that the Kenya National Highways Authority provides platforms for community members to voice concerns or suggestions regarding road projects in the region ($M=3.77$; $SD=1.30$). Findings agreed with Mayienda (2020) established that KURA engaged various categories of people in the public in their project designs as well as in implementation. These included; the general public, community representatives and opinion leaders. It further established that the public was engaged in various stages of the road project development ranging from the feasibility study, planning stage, project design, during tendering as well as in project implementation.

Finally, 129(73.2%) of the respondents agreed that the community is well-informed and involved in the monitoring and evaluation of road projects implemented by KeNHA in the North Rift Region while 42(23.7%) disagreed that the community is well-informed and involved in the monitoring and evaluation of road projects implemented by KeNHA in the North Rift Region. Also, in terms of mean and standard deviation the respondents agreed that the community is well-informed and involved in the monitoring and evaluation of road projects implemented by KeNHA in the North Rift Region ($M=3.71$; $SD=1.31$). Findings align with Omar, (2024) established that monitoring and evaluation practices had a positive influence the performance of logistic projects implemented by Kenfreight East Africa Limited.

Table 2

Correlation Analysis Results

		Organizational performance	Community empowerment	Organizational culture
Organizational performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Community empowerment	Pearson Correlation	.724**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
Organizational culture	Pearson Correlation	.525**	.372**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data (2025)

According to Table 2, the research found that community empowerment was positively associated with organizational performance of Kenya National Highways Authority, North Rift Region ($r=0.724^{**}$; $p<0.01$). Organizational culture was found to have a statistically significant relationship with organizational performance of Kenya National Highways Authority, North Rift Region ($r=0.525^{**}$; $p<0.01$).

Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis

In order to establish the interaction effect between independent variables and dependent variable, organizational culture was used as a moderating variable. The hierarchical linear regression analysis was used to test moderating influence (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Table 3

Hierarchical Moderated Regression Analysis Summary

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	p-v	β	p-v
(Constant)	1.109	.000	.655	.000
Community empowerment	.639	.000	.541	.000
Organizational culture			.122	.001
F statistic	192.492		130.426	
R ²	0.524		0.600	
R ² change	0.		0.076	

* . significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: Research Data (2025)

The optimal model was;

$$Y = 0.655 + 0.541X_1 + 0.237Z$$

Discussions

The results revealed that KeNHA community empowerment programmes led to establishment of jobs in road construction and maintenance projects in the North Rift Region. The respondents also confirmed that better infrastructure was enjoyed in the local communities due to the empowerment programs of the KeNHA that created a feeling of ownership of the projects. Another finding of the research was that KeNHA offered a forum where members of the community could raise community issues and their recommendations on road projects, and that community involvement in monitoring and assessment of road development programs was a common practice. The practices led to increased transparency as well as inclusiveness and accountability in the implementation of projects. Lastly, the regression analysis found that community empowerment influenced organizational performance of KeNHA positively and significantly in the North Rift Region ($\beta_1=0.206$, $p<0.05$). This means programs focused on engaging and empowering the local communities would help to add value to better project performances and Organizational Performances.

Conclusions

The research found that organizational culture is a crucial moderating factor in the performance at KeNHA. Employee motivation and the enhancement of decision-making in all levels were achieved due to a culture of collaboration, innovation, accountability, and continuous learning. Besides, the effective culture encouraged inclusivity, good communication and engagement of the community which enhanced the positive impact of the community empowerment and community sustainability programs. On the whole, the results indicated that the inclusion of a supportive and performance-oriented organizational culture enhances the effects of other performance drivers hence the sustainable success of road development projects.

Recommendations

According to the findings, the study suggests that KeNHA must constantly improve the capacity of its staff members by training them regularly, engaging them in mentorship programs and providing them with professional development opportunities. The research also proposes that KeNHA ought to intensify stakeholder involvement through the introduction of formal and participatory structures of participation. All road project planning and implementation must also involve communities, vulnerable groups as well as local leaders.

The study further suggests that KeNHA would need to focus more on effective financial management through disbursement of funds on time, budgeting, and open allocation of resources. The Authority must also explore other models of funding, including the idea of the public-private partnership to ease the reliance on the constrained government funds. Healthy financial planning will help the Authority to maintain good performance, project deadlines and also sustain quality standards.

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