

## **Influence of Strategic Leadership on Organizational Performance of County Government of Kitui, Kenya**

Damaris Mutheu Mumo<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Paul Kirigia, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Nancy Rintari, PhD<sup>3</sup>  
Department of Business Administration, Kenya Methodist University  
\*Corresponding Author's E-mail: mumodamaris20@gmail.com

**Accepted: 01 August 2025 || Published: 11 August 2025**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of strategic leadership on the organizational performance of the County Government of Kitui, Kenya. A descriptive research design was used to determine the characteristics of the population under consideration. The respondents comprised 21 directors, 34 departmental managers, and 308 administrators. The study used a simple random method to sample the directors, departmental managers, and administrators. In the determination of the sample size, the study used Kothari's (2004) formula to select the 17 directors, 25 departmental managers, and 73 administrators. The study had questionnaires and interview guides to collect data from the participants. The directors were interviewed, whereas the departmental managers and administrators answered questionnaires. A pre-test study was undertaken in Machakos County Government. The study considered three types of validity, which were content, construct, and criterion. Cronbach's alpha was one of the methods of internal consistency that examined reliability. Notably, complete questionnaires were coded into SPSS version 26. Various descriptive statistics, like frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were derived. Inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation were analyzed to test the hypothesis, whereas the linear regression analysis including was provided. The regression coefficient for strategic leadership is 0.261. Further, the results indicate that all the variables had a significance value of less than 0.05 and a T-statistic of more than 2, meaning that strategic plan implementation variables were statistically significant. The study concluded that, the county leadership of Kitui had provided a suitable environment that supported learning and development among its staff. This was to improve their knowledge on the vision, mission, public policy, and get acquainted with various changing county operations. To improve the effectiveness of strategic leadership, the departmental directors should consider empowering communication policies that define horizontal and vertical communication structure.

**Keywords:** *Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance, Kitui County Government, Kenya.*

**How to Cite:** Mumo, D. M., Kirigia, P., & Rintari, N. (2025). Influence of Strategic Leadership on Organizational Performance of County Government of Kitui, Kenya. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 5(4), 41-53.

### **1. Introduction**

Organizational performance is described as the process through which a public entity utilizes various internal and external resources to achieve its desired strategic goals (Gutterman, 2023). Public organizations are governed through the constitution and hence have the legal approval to be provided with resources through taxation, grants, and donations. This is to be able to

develop clear and achievable targets that can culminate in service delivery to the citizens (Umar, 2020). Through doing this, a nation is able to achieve social goals such as reduction in poverty, access to good health, quality education, a clean environment, job provision, and reduction of social inequalities (Drago et al., 2023). Nevertheless, in the quest for attaining the desired performance, most governments have experienced challenges.

A global nation such as America has been struggling with unclear policies and procedures on how to implement strategies (Johanson & Vakkuri, 2020). This has brought about confusion on which strategies should be prioritized. Recently, in a state such as California, shortcomings of a lack of commitment to the strategic implementation process of controlled burns and modernization of water systems were witnessed (Forest Management Task Force [FMTF], 2021). This weakness resulted in a wildfire burning thousands of houses to ashes, despite the area being prone to hot weather and having experienced the same but of less magnitude in the past (Regan, 2025).

Strategic plan implementation is the process of activating the strategies into specific, actionable activities that yield desired results (Twum et al., 2024). The study assessed strategic leadership, which is the ability of a manager to guide county government's processes to junior staff as a measure of ensuring long-term success in various activities undertaken (Karani, 2022). In strategic leadership, the division of strategic tasks among staff is made possible for purposes of accountability.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The county government's goal of implementing laid strategies should be guided by its vision and mission (Ndevu, 2022). They should be well structured in a manner that promotes timely resource allocation that can be executed in a healthy organizational culture that respects the leadership guidance and follows the laid-down procedures on how to monitor and evaluate the achievement of the strategies (Riany, 2021). By doing this, county governments should be able to balance their recurrent and development expenditures, hence improving their performance. However, despite having an operational strategic plan, county governments in Kenya have witnessed a decline in the absorption rate of development expenditure into the development budget from 4% (Kshs 6.92 billion) in the first quarter of 2023/24 to 3% (Kshs 6.71 billion) in a similar time of 2024/25 (Office of the Controller of Budget [OCOB], 2024).

### **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

To examine the influence of strategic leadership on the organizational performance of the County Government of Kitui, Kenya.

### **1.3 Research Hypothesis**

H01: Strategic leadership has no statistically significant influence on the organizational performance of the County Government of Kitui, Kenya.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

The theory of organizational configuration was developed by Mintzberg (1979). According to this theory, an organization entails how complex structures, processes, and policies independently work together to attain the desired strategic goals. The elements specifically mentioned included the structure, machinery, bureaucracy, job roles, and adhocracy. These elements were noted by Mintzberg (1979) to possess different characteristics, and hence, when combined, result in improved outcomes in the organization. The main aspect of these complex

elements was their ability to work independently but within the organizational scope to enhance performance. The theory of organizational configuration informed the strategic leadership construct on the perspective that the management, being the decision makers, has control over how various organizational structures and policies work (Huang et al., 2022). This was because they provided guidelines and were involved in setting the vision and goals of the organization. It is through their initiation that quality was enhanced both from a decision-making perspective and in the communication and execution of the strategies. Therefore, strategic leadership provided an innovation baseline to support feedback from the staff and encourage them to become more productive (Karani, 2022).

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Logan (2024) explored how Canadian organizations' performance was affected by strategic leadership. The study made use of secondary data from published research, journals, and reports. According to the study, there was a strong correlation between concepts of leadership and an organization's overall success. It was discovered that effective strategic leadership, which is defined by flexibility, goals, and a clear connection with corporate goals, drives higher productivity levels. Transformational and participatory leaders frequently encourage creativity, employee involvement, and a healthy workplace culture, all of which boost output and provide businesses with an edge over their competitors. Nevertheless, Logan (2024) did not address the input of strategic leaders on vision and goal setting. Therefore, through the use of primary data obtained from questionnaires given to participants, the current study delved deeply into how strategic leadership affected organizational performance.

Additionally, in Uganda, Irene et al. (2024) investigated how organizational performance in Namisindwa District Local Government was affected by leadership styles. The study was qualitative and explanatory. The results of the study showed a complex and varied relationship that highlights the value of adaptable and subtle leadership techniques. Significantly, the study found that a number of criteria, including ability to communicate, capability to make decisions, emotional intelligence, vision setting, strategic thinking, flexibility, honesty, and the capacity to uplift and encourage others, were frequently used to gauge the efficacy of leaders in Uganda. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of a versatile leadership approach tailored to the unique needs and challenges of the local government environment. In order to optimize results in performance, Irene et al. (2024) suggested that the leadership style be chosen by the organization's leadership structure and objectives. However, Irene et al. (2024) did not indicate how strategic leadership supported learning and development in the organization for sustainable growth and development. As a result, the current study went into further detail about how strategic leadership affected the performance of the County Government of Kitui.

Further, Paul et al. (2025) explored Kenyan county governments' performance and how they were impacted by strategic leadership. The key data sources were peer-reviewed academic papers, government documents, and appropriate case studies. The review focused on analyzing contemporary scholarly works. Strategic leadership is vital for enhancing the performance of Kenyan county governments, as highlighted in this review study. Paul et al. (2025) highlighted how objectives and goals formulation, planning for strategy-making decisions, and dealing with change influenced outcomes for performance. The study found that each aspect enhances productivity in operations, the delivery of services, and governance success. Further, this study discovered that the involvement of staff by management in defining vision and mission statements improved motivation and engagement, which improved performance. Based on these findings, more research into how strategic leadership influences performance is required, but in a different county, such as the County Government of Kitui. Thus, the current study

used questionnaires as the primary method of data collection from study participants to explore how strategic leadership influences performance in the County Government of Kitui.

3. Methodology

A descriptive research design was used to determine the characteristics of the population under consideration. The respondents comprised 21 directors, 34 departmental managers, and 308 administrators. The study used a simple random method to sample the directors, departmental managers, and administrators. In the determination of the sample size, the study used Kothari's (2004) formula to select the 17 directors, 25 departmental managers, and 73 administrators. The study had questionnaires and interview guides to collect data from the participants. The directors were interviewed, whereas the departmental managers and administrators answered questionnaires. A pre-test study was undertaken in Machakos County Government. The study considered three types of validity, which were content, construct, and criterion. Cronbach's alpha was one of the methods of internal consistency that examined reliability. Notably, complete questionnaires were coded into SPSS version 26. Various descriptive statistics, like frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were derived. Inferential statistics included Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

The percentage of the intended respondents who genuinely participate in a study is known as the response rate. The target sample size for this investigation was 115. There were 73 administrators, 25 departmental managers, and 17 directors who made up the sample size. Table 1 displays the response rates for each category.

Table 1: Response rate

Sample Category	Expected Response	Actual Response	Percentage
Directors	17	13	76%
Departmental managers	25	19	76%
Administrators	73	62	85%
Total	115	94	82%

Table 1 shows that 13 (76%) of the 17 director interviews that were planned were completed satisfactorily. Notably, 81 (83%) of the 98 questionnaires that were given to department managers and administrators were returned filled out. Consequently, Creswell and Port (2017) acknowledged that a response rate of at least 70% is a good representation of a targeted community and that the overall response rate of 82% was excellent representativeness. Given the size of the sample, it was inferred that conclusions regarding the features of the population may be drawn from the data.

4.2 Reliability Results

A reliability test assesses how well a research tool generates comparable results after multiple trials. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed in this study using Cronbach's Alpha (Ng, 2024). High internal consistency is indicated by a high value (above 0.5) of the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, a statistic that runs from 0 to 1. As shown in Table 2,

a pilot study was carried out in Machakos County Government to assess the study instruments' clarity and dependability.

**Table 2: Reliability Results**

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
Strategic leadership	0.876
Average	0.867

The study's instruments were straightforward and dependable, as seen by the average Cronbach's alpha of 0.867 in Table 2, which falls between 0.7 and 1. The questions were related to one another, as evidenced by the corresponding internal consistency. As a result, the respondents felt that the questions in the interview guide and questionnaires were clear and intelligible.

#### 4.3 Descriptive Results of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance was the dependent variable of the study, and it had indicators such as efficient service delivery, compliance and regulations, and economic development. The descriptive results are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Performance**

N=81	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Efficient service delivery increases organizational performance.	5(6%)	2(3%)	7(9%)	27(33%)	40(49%)	4.11	1.072
There is a policy to promote effective compliance.	2(2%)	3(4%)	0(0%)	48(59%)	28(35%)	4.20	0.828
Strategic plan implementation influences organizational performance	2(2%)	4(5%)	68(84%)	3(4%)	4(5%)	3.04	0.621
Strategic leadership has taken time to explain to the staff on their relevance	28(35%)	39(48%)	6(7%)	3(4%)	5(6%)	2.35	1.131
Increased coordination of different departments	1(1%)	5(6%)	61(75%)	11(14%)	3(4%)	3.12	0.620

The results in Table 3 indicate that 28 (35%) strongly agreed and 48 (59%) agreed on a mean scale of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.828, that there was a policy to promote effective compliance and regulation for every process of implementing strategies. Further, 40 (49%)



strongly agreed and 27 (33%) agreed on a mean of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 1.072 that efficient service delivery increased the organizational performance of the county government. Nevertheless, with a mean score of 2.35 and a standard deviation of 1.131, 28 (35%) strongly disagreed and 39 (48%) disagreed that the county's strategic leadership has taken time to explain to the staff their relevance towards enhancing the economic development of the County Government of Kitui.

There were efforts made by the leadership of the county government of Kitui to comply with the law and demand compliance among its departments, and enhance service delivery. In lieu of this, the respondents confirmed that there were policies that guided how the government regulations were to be implemented. Farhiya and Maurice (2022) established that county governments in Kenya had incorporated policies and frameworks that were instrumental in project implementation. In a similar pattern to the observations made in the county government of Kitui, Kimanzi and Ngugi (2022) also discovered that structured compliance mechanisms enhanced accountability and were instrumental in the reduction of poor resource management. However, strategic communication was discovered to encounter challenges from the perspective of leaders not elaborating to the county employees on how the assigned tasks supported the county in attaining economic development. Therefore, a disconnect was noted in relation to the internal communication system, with emphasis being on staff training on how their roles fit in the bigger picture of the county's vision and align with broader economic goals.

In the interview questions, the first question was about explaining the management supervision role in ensuring that departments deliver efficient services. The supervisors have a role in monitoring the strategic plan implementation as a measure of checking on the usage of resources as per the Public Finance Management Act, which directs the provision of services that have a direct advantage to the citizens. Therefore, the managers are actively engaged in reviewing departmental reports. Furthermore, the supervisors guided and offered corrective feedback to the workers. This was to ensure that there was a cohesive and safe working environment.

The second question was on the elaboration of the contribution of the county government policy structure towards departmental compliance and regulations. The contributions mentioned that the presence of CDIP and policies on budgets supports the departments in conducting their activities within recognizable legal structures and setting objectives. There were oversight bodies such as the county assembly and public service board, which ensured that the operations within county departments were aligned with the constitution and transparent. There were also audits conducted frequently to support the departments in remaining within legal limits. In agreement, a respondent indicated that,

*"Budget monitoring and consistent audit practices give the county leadership a chance to know what is going on in the departments and how the gaps noted could be resolved."*

The third question was on the common issues faced by the management in the process of strategic implementation supervision. The common issues mentioned included employee resistance, lack of resources to support satisfactory supervision, county politics, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, lack of skilled supervisors in resolving notable concerns, and an inadequate communication structure that does not permit the exchange of ideas across the spectrum of organizational levels of management.

#### 4.4 Descriptive Statistics of Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership is the first independent variable of the study, and the measured indicators include vision and goal setting, quality decision-making, innovation, communication, learning and development, and employee involvement. The ordinal Likert scale used indicated that 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. The descriptive results are provided in Table 4, and thereafter, the interview results are provided.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Strategic Leadership**

N=81	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
The county is guided by vision and goal-setting	1(1%)	3(4%)	4(5%)	50(62%)	23(28%)	4.09	0.840
Quality decision-making enhances impactful strategies.	3(4%)	1(1%)	64(79%)	11(14%)	2(2%)	3.06	0.659
Innovation is encouraged	1(1%)	3(4%)	58(72%)	9(11%)	10(12%)	3.31	0.801
Well-developed communication structure	21(26%)	45(56%)	3(4%)	6(7%)	6(7%)	2.15	1.119
Departmental members are encouraged to keep advancing their knowledge	3(4%)	2(2%)	1(1%)	47(58%)	28(35%)	4.17	0.877
Involvement of employees in the implementation of strategies encourages	4(5%)	1(1%)	5(6%)	45(56%)	26(32%)	3.90	1.032

The statistical data in Table 4 shows that 28 (35%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 47 (58%) agreed, on a mean score of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.877, that departmental members were encouraged to keep on advancing their knowledge through learning and development. Additionally, 23 (28%) strongly agreed and 50 (62%) agreed on a mean of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.840 that the county operations were guided by the organizational vision and goal setting. Nevertheless, 21 (26%) strongly disagreed and 45 (56%) disagreed on a mean of 2.15 and a standard deviation of 1.119 that there was a well-developed communication structure in place to manage information. The results indicate that within the county government of Kitui, there was a strong organizational emphasis on professional development that was aligned with the strategic goals.

As pointed out by most participants, the staff within the departments were supported to develop their skills through enrolling in learning and development programs. In support of the results, Ntoiti and Makau (2022) discovered that training of staff within the Kenyan county governments in Kenya increased the service delivery mechanism and enabled them to become more innovative in their roles. Furthermore, the study by Mutembei and Kithae (2023) noted that there was enhanced staff motivation in organizations that supported learning initiatives among their employees. The findings also revealed that the operations were guided by the county's vision and set goals, which was an indication that the leadership was in control and offered direction.

According to Kibai and Awuor (2024), positive performance was only experienced when the strategic plans were aligned with the set goals. Therefore, through the initiatives of the county leadership, the staff were able to get clarity on various assigned goals for effectiveness and the cultivation of public trust in public service. That notwithstanding, there were internal communication concerns that limited complete coordination and exchange of information in various departments of the county government of Kitui. The results mirror Kimanzi and Ngugi (2022), who also established that efficient communication frameworks were low in most devolved governments, affecting the process of decision-making and departmental coordination.

A highlight on the need for investments in communication systems was encouraged by Irene et al. (2024) since it's neglected, yet a vital part of strategic planning. In the interview questions, the study inquired about the input that the strategic leaders had made with regard to the vision and goal setting in the county government of Kitui. The study noted that the strategic leaders were directly involved in stakeholder engagement, policy formulation, and strategic planning processes through three themes. In regard to stakeholder engagement, the strategic leaders were vocal in the management consultative forums with internal and external stakeholders.

In policy formulation, it was noted that they ensured that departmental inputs were coordinated by making sure that county goals did not remain on paper but were actualized through community-led initiatives. In regard to strategic planning purposes, the strategic leaders ensured that basic sectors like health, water, and education were made a priority through the formulation and implementation of strategies as per the County Government Act. That notwithstanding, the study discovered that the process of strategic implementation to align with the county's vision at times was engulfed with low inclusivity of employees and poor monitoring frameworks to support it. In confirmation of the result, a respondent indicated that,

*"The county government employees are not accorded a chance to contribute their opinion on how the strategies could be better aligned with the vision."*



The second interview question inquired about how strategic leadership supported learning and development in the organization for sustainable growth and development. The feedback indicated that learning and development were greatly supported by the leadership by guaranteeing its sustainability over a long time. The leaders provided an environment that incorporated a learning culture by enhancing capacity building, knowledge sharing, and providing financial and moral support to formal and informal efforts of the county government staff. It was also established that the leaders incorporated professional development in the systems through resource allocation to enhance training, mentorship, and performance appraisals. A respondent indicated that,

*“Training is an ongoing process that enables the county departments to prepare adequately for a change of demands.”*

Therefore, this showcases a focused mindset by the leaders on becoming resilient towards environmental, political, and economic challenges. The respondents also mentioned that staff were allowed not only to share creative ideas but also to test them in an environment that promotes innovation. This was done through existing workshops and benchmarking opportunities to enable the staff to express ideas explicitly. The strategic leadership also promoted succession planning through talent development initiatives that were in line with what the county department needed. Through such an approach, there was less overreliance on external skills when an internal work demand arose in the county government of Kitui.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

The hypothesis, H<sub>01</sub>, stated that strategic leadership has no statistically significant influence on the organizational performance of the County Government of Kitui, Kenya. Table 5 provides the results.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Strategic Leadership on Organizational Performance

		Organizational Performance	Strategic leadership
Organizational Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.259*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	81	81
Strategic Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.259*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	81	81

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

4.6 Regression Analysis

The study conducted regression analysis to identify the coefficient of the study model, that indicated that  $Y = C + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$ . This is where Y = Organizational Performance; C = Constant;  $\beta_1$  = Coefficients to be estimated; X<sub>1</sub> = Strategic Leadership and  $\varepsilon$  = Error term. Table 6 provides the results.

**Table 6: Regression Weights of Strategic Leadership on Organizational Performance**

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T
1	(Constant)	5.832	4.622		1.262
	Strategic Leadership	.261	.111	.260	2.390

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance

The data in Table 6 shows that the regression coefficient for strategic leadership is 0.261. Further, the results indicate that all the variables had a significance value of less than 0.05 and a T-statistic of more than 2, meaning that strategic plan implementation variables were statistically significant. Therefore, when equated to the equation,  $Y=5.832+0.261X_1+4.622$ . Additionally, the results indicate that a one-unit increase in strategic leadership increases organizational performance. The findings related to strategic leadership align with Thuo et al. (2024), who examined how Kenya’s Kajiado county government organizational performance was influenced by leadership styles. The findings revealed that good leadership styles had a positive influence on organizational performance. In addition, the style of leaders coming up with better visions of the organization was essential in motivating employees, allowing them to work toward the intended objective. The study also noted that when leaders encouraged active participation of staff in decision-making, the performance of the organization improved. Despite this, Thuo et al. (2024) did not include how better leadership styles improved employee empowerment.

Kibai and Awuor (2024) examined how Kenya’s public institution performance was influenced by leadership styles. The findings of the study showed that good leadership styles had a positive impact on the organizational performance of the Kenyan government. It was further noted that a transformational leadership style was essential in ensuring that organizations came up with a clear vision that motivated staff to work toward attaining organizational goals. In addition, an improved leadership style ensured that employees were involved in decision-making. Further, Kibai and Awuor (2024) noted that transformational leadership created a room for innovation through coming up with clear innovation.

**5. Conclusion**

As far as strategic leadership is concerned, the county leadership of Kitui had provided a suitable environment that supported learning and development among its staff. This was to improve their knowledge on the vision, mission, public policy, and get acquainted with various changing county operations. As the county assembly made changes to the county Act, it affected the nature and scope of operations. This was in terms of stakeholder engagement, policy formulation, and strategic planning processes. To empower learning and development among the staff was therefore a suitable step that aligned them with the changes. However, there were undeveloped structures of communication to enable the county government to fully benefit from information sharing across various departments.

## 6. Recommendations

To improve the effectiveness of strategic leadership, the departmental directors should consider empowering communication policies that define horizontal and vertical communication structures. The respective managers in the sub-units should provide a conducive environment through encouraging the staff to utilize the available communication systems in the county government. The study encourages the management to develop knowledge management systems that provides content to foster communication between departments. The staff are recommended to consider using both traditional and e-communication platforms such as emails, social media, and websites to expand their need or communication needs.

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