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INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ON STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Strategic leadership has been identified as one of the possible determinants of organizational processes and outcomes. In spite of the increasing role of strategic leadership in organizations, the influence of strategic leadership on strategy implementation has been given scanty attention in prior studies. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of strategic leadership on strategy implementation in universities in Kenya. The study targeted 31 chartered public universities and 18 chartered private universities. Structured questionnaires were used to collect the data. The respondents were the executive officers of the universities who included Vice-Chancellors, DVC's, Registrars, Principals, Deputy Principals, Human Resource Managers and Chief Finance Officers. Regression analysis was performed to determine the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. The results revealed that strategic leadership styles (transformational and transactional) singly and jointly had a positive effect on strategy implementation.



The study therefore recommends that all organizations both public and private should practice strategic leadership, both transformational and transactional leadership to ensure success in strategy implementation and thus improve organizational performance.

Keywords; *Strategic Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Strategy Implementation, Contextual Factors*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Strategic leadership has been identified as one of the possible determinants of effective strategy implementation (Barend, 2016). Hadiyah et al. (2015) contends that strategic leadership is a pillar to the success of any strategic management process. Pearce and Robinson (2000) described strategic leadership and management as a set of decisions and actions that result in the formulation, implementation, and control of plans designed to achieve an organization's vision, mission, and strategic objectives. University education is vital to a country's efforts in increasing social capital and in promoting its social cohesion, which is an important determinant of economic growth and development (Uthoff et al., 2013). Despite the role of universities in economic growth, universities globally are facing several challenges including increased competition and financial sustainability (Shah & Nair, 2014). These challenges compel universities to rethink on how to ensure effective strategy implementation.

Researchers focusing on factors influencing successful strategy implementation have identified resources, management skills and leadership as factors that may influenced strategy implementation (Ogata & Waynoka, 2015). In spite of the importance of strategic leadership in influencing organizational processes and outcomes, past studies have mainly focused on leadership in general or on leadership styles affecting strategy implementation. Hence, the role of strategic leadership in strategy implementation has been given scanty attention. This study therefore sought to examine the influence of strategic leadership on strategy implementation in universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership has been identified as one of the key ingredients to effective strategy implementation (Hadiyah et al. 2015; Barend, 2016). According to Pearce and Robinson (2011), strategic leadership plays a critical role in ensuring the survival of an organization in a dynamic environment. Lussier and Achua (2007) define strategic leadership as the ability to envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization. Pearce and Robinson (2000) described strategic leadership and management as a set of decisions and actions that result in the formulation, implementation, and control of plans designed to achieve an organization's vision, mission, and strategic objectives. Strategic leadership is important in an organization because it helps to create a strategic vision for a firm by thinking of the future and energizes the human resources of the firm to achieve positive outcomes. Strategic leadership also plays a central role in the organization's capacity to learn from its past, adapt to its present, and create its future (Hit et al., 2010).

Strategic leaders can have noticeable effect on organizational performance through conceptualizing job and environmental conditions and establishing good interaction with employees (Poursadegh et al., 2012). They align employee's actions with strategic direction, facilitate achievement of goals and through development of core



competencies as the source of competitive advantages. Hit et al. (2010) outlined key strategic leadership actions that contribute positively to strategy implementation: determining strategic direction; establishing balanced organizational controls; effectively managing the organization's resource portfolio; sustaining an effective organizational culture; emphasizing ethical practices; developing human capital and maintaining core competencies and developing social capital.

Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation success is the desire of any organization. Strategy implementation is a process by which policies and strategies are actualized through provision of budgets, development of procedures and programs (Wheelan & Hunger, 2008). Daft (2010) stated that a strategy gives a company a competitive edge only if it is skillfully executed through the decisions and actions of front-line managers and employees. According to Hyväri (2016), top management plays a key role in the implementation of a strategy within an organization. Schaap (2012) also stated that implementation of a strategy is a practical operation and an activity of human behavior oriented to action that requires executive leadership and key managerial skills. Nyamwanza (2013) identified lack of strategic leadership by senior management as one of the main barriers to effective implementation of strategy. Abdulwahid et al. (2013) explored the factors which cause the failure of strategy plan implementation in public health sectors. In their study, they argue that leadership role is important in formulation and implementation of a strategic plan and if the strategic leader is not involved in strategy implementation, leadership is not able to create a vivid vision for any strategic program.

Strategic Leadership and Strategy Implementation

Several studies have shown that transformational leadership has positive effect on strategy implementation. For instance, a study by Ishaq et al. (2018) examining leadership styles in terms of implementation of the strategy at the Administration Police Service in Lamu County, Kenya using a survey method of study. The study found out that there was a positive and significant relationship between leadership style and implementation of the strategy. Oketch and Kilika (2017) carried out a study on the characteristics of top management (TMT), the execution of the strategy and the performance of the company. From the study, they concluded that TMT characteristics can influence the performance of their companies through the implementation of the various strategies identified by the organization. In addition, they added that the implementation of strategies can influence the final result of an organization, but this relationship occurs through the decisions and actions of TMT.

Kabaiku and Karanja (2017) examined the effects of leadership in executing strategies in private dairies in Mount Kenya region. The study examined the effect of leadership style, leadership support, leadership communication and leadership structure in the execution of the strategy. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between leadership and execution of strategy in companies. Their findings supported the findings of a study by Koech and Namusunge (2012) who found a positive correlation between transformational leadership and successful strategy implementation. Given the above theoretical arguments and empirical findings, it was hypothesized that:

H₁: Transformational leadership has a positive effect of strategy implementation

H₂: Transactional leadership has a positive effect of strategy implementation

H₃: Strategic leadership has a positive effect on strategy implementation.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the upper Echelons theory. Elenkov, Judge and Wright (2005) indicate that in the 1970s and 1980s there was considerable divergence of opinion on the impact of leadership on performance with sceptics on one hand contending that leadership behaviors influenced organizational performance less than environmental or organizational factors (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), while proponents maintained that leaders' attitudes had a significant impact on organization performance. It is in response to this skepticism that Hambrick and Mason (1984) came up with the Upper Echelons Theory, the precursor to Strategic Leadership Theory. The Upper Echelons Theory is attributed to a seminal paper presented by Hambrick and Mason in 1984 which states that strategic choices and business performance are dependent on the characteristics of dominant actors within an organization and in particular the top management team. The background characteristics are broadly classified as psychological (cognitive base, values) and observable characteristics (age, education, functional tracks, other career experiences etc) (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The theory suggests that organizations are reflections of the top management team 's cognition and values and organizational outcomes – strategic choices and performance levels are partially predicted by managerial background characteristics i.e. reflection of the values and cognitive bases of powerful actors in the organization. The theory argues that individual psychological factors and observable experiences affect strategic choices, which in turn, affect performance (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990).

The amounts of discretion enjoyed by the top management team will moderate the relationship between strategic choices and organizational outcomes, where the more discretion, the greater the impact of choice on the outcomes (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). The Upper echelons research has recognized that the extent to which top managers matter to organizational outcomes depend on how much discretion (latitude of action) is availed. Discretion refers to absence of constraints to decision making amidst many plausible alternative courses of strategic action, where managers with more discretion are more likely to realize their original intentions and vice versa (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990; Elenkov et al., 2005). Upper echelons theory suggests that the specific knowledge, experience, values, and performance of top managers influence their assessment of the environment and thus the strategic choices they make (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). The later expansion of the Upper Echelons Theory into Finkelstein and Hambrick 's (1996) strategic leadership Theory examines the psychological make-up of the top manager and how this influences information processing and strategic decision making.

The upper echelons research has also recognized that sometimes top managers matter to a significant extent to organizational outcomes, at one extreme, sometimes not at all, at the other extreme, and often are somewhere in between, depending on the level of discretion or latitude of action, is afforded to them (Elenkov et al., 2005). Discretion is defined as the absence of constraints to decision making and when there are many plausible alternative courses of strategic action. The more the discretion, the more likely it is that top managers are likely to realize their original intentions and vice versa. Most studies on upper echelons theory have been conducted in western, developed (predominantly the United States) economies and it is thus unknown and relatively unexplored just how strategic leadership behaviors vary throughout the rest of the world. The upper echelons perspective has provided good theoretical and some empirical arguments for the central role of strategic leadership but our understanding is still lacking in significant ways (Elenkov et al., 2005).



In essence, the upper echelons theory underscores the notion that it is the experiences, values, and personalities of the dominant actors (leaders) that influence their leadership styles. The top management team forms the unit of analysis as this dominant coalition acts as a decision-making unit for the organization (Elenkov et al., 2005). In this study, the unit of analysis is all the top-level management members who are regarded as the strategic leaders and the ones directly involved in the implementation of strategy in the Universities in Kenya. Their leadership actions will be influenced by their experiences, values and unique personalities. This study adopted upper echelons theory since the theory suggests that top managers' actions, behaviors, experience and strategic choices determine the success in strategy implementation and performance of their organizations. In the study, the independent variables are transformational and transactional leadership while the dependent variable is strategy implementation. These variables are related as shown in Figure 1.

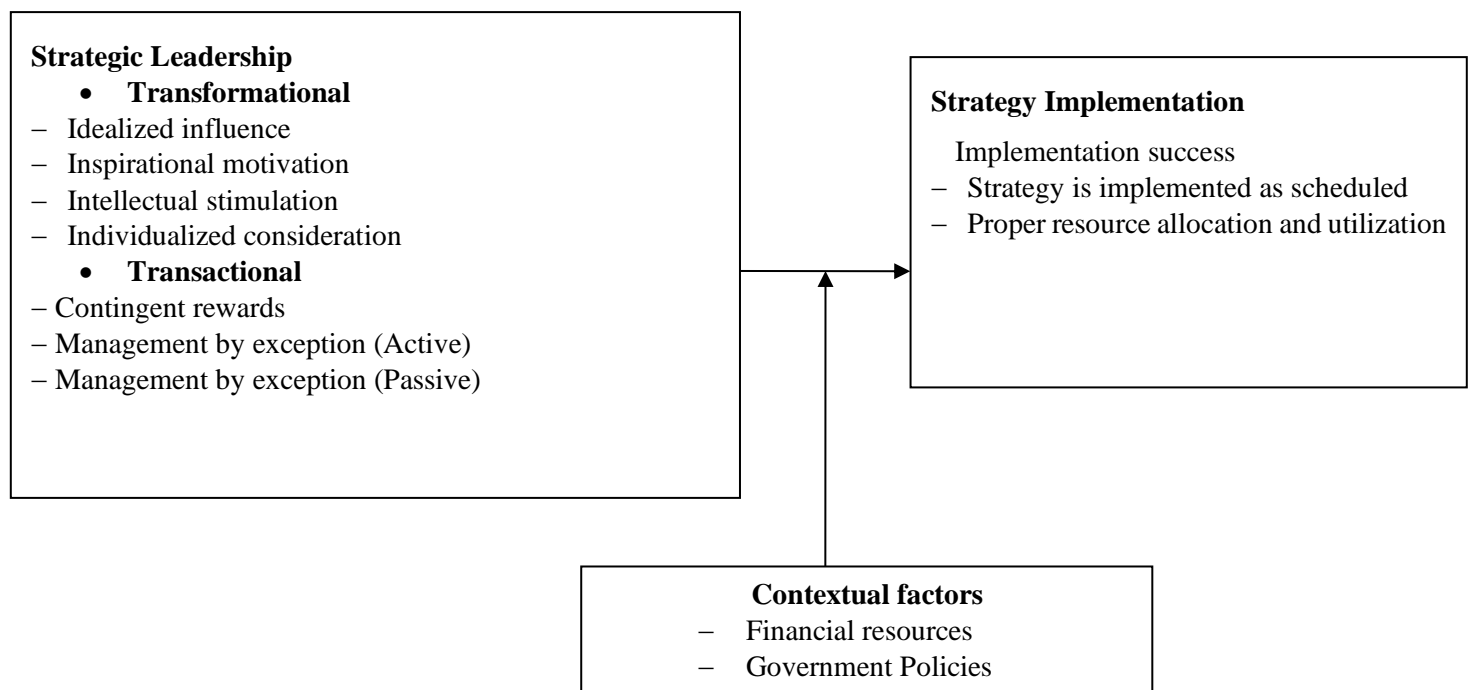


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Relationship between Strategic Leadership, Contextual Factors and Strategy Implementation

Figure 1 shows the existence of a relationship between independent and dependent variables in the study. The components of transformational leadership include; idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. The dimensions of transactional leadership include; contingent rewards, management by exception (active) and management by exception (Passive). The dependent variable is the implementation that essentially entails the achievement of the strategic objectives that the Universities intend to achieve. The achievement of the strategic objectives realized when strategy is implemented as scheduled, activities are well organized as per the strategy and proper



allocation and utilization of resources. It was expected that transformational leadership would influence strategy implementation. It is also expected that the relationship between strategic leadership and strategy implementation is influenced by contextual factors such as availability of financial resources and government policies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted both explanatory and cross-sectional survey research designs to determine the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. The population comprised 31 chartered public universities and 18 chartered private Universities in Kenya as at November 2017 (CUE, 2017). The study targeted all the 49 universities. To test the hypotheses, primary data was collected. The data was collected using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents. Since the unit of analysis was the firm, one respondent in each university participated in the study. The respondents were the executive officers of the universities who included Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Principals, Deputy Principals, Human Resource Managers and Chief Finance Officers. They were selected since the executive officers are considered to be better informed about strategic leadership and strategy implementation in their institutions.

The independent variable was strategic leadership while the dependent variable was strategy implementation. Strategic leadership was measured in terms of transformational and transactional leadership as conceptualized by Vera and Crossan (2004). A five-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5) was used. Strategy implementation was measured using implementation success as conceptualized by (Herminia, 2008). A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5) was used. The data from the study was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS. This study utilized percentages, means and standard deviation to describe the study variables. Simple regression analysis and multiple regression analysis were used to test the research hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response rate

Out of the 49 targeted universities, complete responses were obtained from 37 universities accounting for 75.5% response rate. This was considered sufficient for the study as it was above the 70% base level as suggested by Baruch (1999). Majority of the respondents were Registrars at 24.32% followed by Deputy Principals at 21.62%, Deputy Vice-Chancellors at 18.92%, Principals at 13.51%, Vice-Chancellors/CEOs at 8.11%, Chief Finance Officers at 8.11% and human resource managers at 5.41%

Reliability of the Instruments

Cronbach reliability coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the research instrument. According to Kombo and Tromb (2009) values exceeding 0.7 indicate the instrument is reliable enough to be used in a study. The study results showed that transformational leadership and transactional leadership had Cronbach coefficient of 0.738 and 0.832 respectively. Strategy implementation had Cronbach coefficient of 0.846, thus the instrument was considered reliable.



Descriptive Statistic for the Study Variables

Respondents' agreement on the aspects of strategic leadership and strategy implementation were analyzed using means and standard deviations. The results of the analysis are presented Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents agreement on strategic leadership and strategy implementation

| Strategic Leadership | N | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|-----------|-------------|-----------------|
| Transformational leadership | | 3.78 | |
| Idealized Influence/Charismatic leadership; The management of this organization; | 37 | 3.67 | 0.705 |
| Makes everyone enthusiastic about assignments | 37 | 3.70 | 0.520 |
| Is completely trusted by the employees | 37 | 3.57 | 0.713 |
| Encourages employees to express their ideas and opinions | 37 | 3.73 | 0.883 |
| Inspirational motivation The management of this organization . . . | | 3.86 | |
| Inspires employees | 37 | 3.82 | 0.845 |
| Inspires employees' loyalty to leadership | 37 | 3.87 | 0.721 |
| Inspires employees' loyalty to the organization | 37 | 3.89 | 1.012 |
| Intellectual stimulation The management of this organization . . . | 37 | 3.82 | 0.823 |
| Gets employees to rethink ideas that they had never questioned before | 37 | 3.91 | 0.675 |
| Enables employees to think about old problems in new ways | 37 | 3.93 | 0.786 |
| Provides employees with new ways of looking at things | 37 | 3.63 | 1.009 |
| Individualized consideration The management of this organization . . . | | 3.76 | |
| Gives personal attention to members who seem neglected | 37 | 3.87 | 0.815 |
| Finds out what employees want and tries to help them get it | 37 | 3.58 | 0.970 |
| Appreciate employees when they do a good job | 37 | 3.83 | 0.783 |
| | N | Mean | Std. Dev |
| Transactional Leadership | | 3.80 | |
| Contingent reward The management of this organization | 37 | 3.75 | 0.658 |
| Tells employees what to do if they want to be rewarded for their efforts | 37 | 3.67 | 0.696 |
| Allows agreement between what employees are expected to put into the group effort and what they can get out of it | 37 | 3.85 | 0.647 |
| Allows negotiation with employees about what they can get from what they can accomplish | 37 | 3.73 | 0.632 |
| Management by exception- active The management of this organization . . . | | 3.84 | |
| Asks employees no more of them than what is absolutely essential to get the work done | 37 | 3.79 | 0.794 |
| Allows employees to take initiatives but does not encourage them to do so | 37 | 3.84 | 0.629 |
| Tells employees what they have to know to do their job | 37 | 3.90 | 0.302 |
| Overall mean | | 3.78 | |
| Strategy Implementation Items | N | Mean | Std. Dev |
| Implementation of the strategy is done as scheduled | 37 | 3.76 | 1.002 |
| Activities are organized according to the strategy to be implemented | 37 | 3.84 | .624 |



| Strategic Leadership | N | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|----|-------------|----------|
| Resources for strategy implementation are allocated as budgeted | 37 | 3.94 | .611 |
| Strategy achieves targeted performance | 37 | 4.18 | .785 |
| Overall mean | | 3.93 | |

The results on Table 1 show that majority of the respondents agree that most of the institutions practice strategic leadership as depicted by an overall mean of 3.78. Most of the respondents used in the study also agreed that their institutions have achieved success in strategy implementation ($M = 3.93$).

Testing of Hypotheses

The study aimed at determining the effects of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. Strategic leadership was conceptualized in terms of transformation leadership and transactional leadership.

Transformational Leadership and Strategy Implementation

The study hypothesized that transformational leadership has a significant effect on strategy implementation. The hypothesis was tested using, simple regression analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Simple Regression Results for Effect of Transformational Leadership on Strategy Implementation Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 | .566 ^a | .320 | .315 | 1.73456 | | |
| ANOVA | | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 193.995 | | 1 | 193.995 | 16.472 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 412.192 | | 35 | 11.776 | | |
| Total | 606.187 | | 36 | | | |
| Coefficients | | | | | | |
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| (Constant) | 4.380 | 1.423 | | 3.078 | .003 | |
| Transformational Leadership | .251 | .031 | .566 | 8.030 | .000 | |

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational Leadership

The regression results in Table 2 show that 32% variation in strategy implementation ($R^2 = 0.320$) is explained by transformational leadership. Further, the ANOVA results show that the effect of transformational leadership on strategy implementation is significant ($F = 16.472$, $p < 0.05$). The standard coefficient also showed that the effect of



transformational leadership is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.566$, $t = 8.030$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the results support the hypothesis that transformational leadership has a significant effect on strategy implementation. These finding is in agreement with the findings by Kabaiku and Karanja (2017) who established a significant positive relationship between leadership and execution of strategy in companies. The study results also support the findings by Long et al. (2014) who established that the characteristics of transformational leadership have significant relationship with job satisfaction.

Transactional Leadership and Strategy Implementation

The study hypothesized that transactional leadership has a significant effect on strategy implementation. To test the hypothesis, simple regression analysis was performed on the data. The results shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple Regression Results for Effect of Transactional Leadership on Strategy Implementation
Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | .649 ^a | .422 | .417 | 1.59963 | |

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 255.63 | 1 | 255.63 | 25.522 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 350.557 | 35 | 10.015 | | |
| Total | 606.187 | 36 | | | |

| Coefficients | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 1.063 | 1.687 | | .630 | .530 |
| Transactional Leadership | .738 | .074 | .649 | 9.995 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Leadership

The results in Table 3 show that transformational leadership explains to 42% of the change in strategy implementation ($R^2 = 0.422$). Further, the ANOVA results reveal that transactional leadership has significant effect on strategy implementation ($F = 25.522$, $p < 0.05$). The standard coefficient also show that the effect of transactional leadership is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.469$, $t = 9.995$, $p < 0.05$). The data thus supports the hypothesis that that transactional leadership has a significant effect on strategy implementation. The finding is consistent with the previous finding by Bass et al. (2003), who found that transactional leaders tend to be stronger on systems, structures and strategy implementation.



Effect of transformational and Transactional Leadership on Strategy Implementation

The study also examined the joint influence of transformational and transactional leadership on strategy implementation. The study hypothesized that both transformational and transactional leadership jointly have a significant effect on strategy implementation. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis on the joint effect of transformational and Transactional Leadership on Strategy Implementation

| Model Summary | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | | Std. Error of the Estimate | | |
| 1 | .750 ^a | .562 | .556 | | 1.39714 | | |
| Analysis of Variance | | | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | | Df | Mean Square | | F | Sig. |
| Regression | 340.717 | | 2 | 170.3585 | | 21.818 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 265.470 | | 34 | 7.807 | | | |
| Total | 606.187 | | 36 | | | | |
| Regression Coefficients | | | | | | | |
| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| Constant) | | 5.685 | 1.632 | | 3.484 | .001 | |
| Transformational Leadership | | .176 | .027 | .396 | 6.602 | .000 | |
| Transactional Leadership | | .591 | .068 | .520 | 8.670 | .000 | |

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership

The results in Table 4 reveal that transformational and transactional leadership explain 56.2% of the variation in strategy implementation ($R^2 = 0.562$). The ANOVA results reveal that the effect of transformational and transactional leadership on strategy implementation is significant ($F = 21.818$, $p < 0.05$). The standard coefficient show that transformational and transactional leadership styles jointly have a positive and significant effect on strategy implementation ($\beta = 0.520$, $t = 8.670$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the data supports the hypothesis that both transformational and transactional leadership jointly have a significant effect on strategy implementation. The study findings corroborate the earlier research findings on strategic leadership and organizational outcomes. These studies include a study by Kitonga et al. 2016) who carried out a study on strategic leadership and organizational performance, their study established a significant positive relationship between strategic leadership variables and organizational performance. Jaleha and Machuki (2018) also demonstrated that strategic leadership plays a role in ensuring an organization's survival in the dynamic and complex environments, and hence improvement in performance.



Carter and Greer (2013) argued that the effect of transformational and transactional leadership on strategy implementation is associated to the fact that strategic leadership is founded on the thought and visionary capabilities aimed at creating a transformative organization. Shoemaker and Krupp (2013) described strategic leadership as not only a factor concerned with possession of unique capabilities to learn and absorb new ideas but also carries the aspect of adaptive capacities for better response to the dynamism and complexity of the external environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to determine the effect of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. More emphasis was given to transformational and transactional leadership styles. From the results it was concluded that Kenyan Universities practice strategic leadership to a great extent. The study findings showed that transformational and transactional leadership styles singly or jointly significantly influence strategy implementation. Thus, practice of strategic leadership leads to success in strategy implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study findings, it is recommended that all organizations both public and private should emphasize on strategic leadership that is both transformational and transactional to ensure success of strategy implementation and thus improving organizational performance both.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest was recorded by the scholars.

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