THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Influence of Strategic Leadership on Operation Efficiency of County Governments in Kenya: A Case Study of Baringo County

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Abstract:
This research aimed to analyze the influence of strategic leadership on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Kenya: a case of Baringo County. The investigation was based on a study by Curteanu and Constantin (2010). This study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population of the study was the 33 members of top management in the County Government of Baringo. The justification for the choice of the county Chief Officers and County Directors is that they are directly in charge of the implementation of the county government strategic plan and operations under their dockets. The researcher took a census of all the thirty-three members of top management (Chief Officers and Directors) by means of self-administered questionnaires. First, there was empirical evidence to prove that resource allocation influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Secondly, it confirmed that there was empirical evidence to prove that integrity and ethical issues influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Thirdly, the study established that strategic control influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Finally, there was empirical evidence to prove that organizational culture influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. The study recommended that the office of the Auditor General should use the results from this investigation to update the management policy of the County Governments as a means of helping the County Governments to achieve more operational efficiency for optimal service delivery and optimized value for money in the County Governments in Kenya. Again, the study recommends that the County Assemblies, in their role of oversight and legislation, should also use the findings from the study to make laws that will enable the County Governments to enhance their performance and governance and be more operationally efficient. Such legislation should encompass resource allocations and internal control principles. Finally, County Chief Officers and County Directors, being senior managers charged with investment portfolios, are subject to fiduciary laws with strict requirements and controls. Therefore, the findings from this study are relevant to inform their undertaking.

Keywords: *Strategic leadership, organizational control, organization resource portfolio, organizational culture change, and operational efficiency*

1. Introduction

Efficiency is associated with how well a relevant action is performed in the fields of engineering and management. Thus, an organization is said to be efficient if it achieves its goals with few resources. The primary goal of operational efficiency is to create work processes that increase productivity and quality (Darrab & Khan, 2010). The true measure of operational efficiency is the ratio of actual productivity to the maximum productivity achievable. The desired productivity is defined as the highest possible attainable productivity. According to Hackman (2008), analyzing productivity and efficiency is linked with economies of production, which answers fundamental questions such as the firm's efficiency in resource utilization during the production process and its efficiency during scaling operations. Efficiency can be categorized into three forms: allocative, scale, and structural efficiency. According to Saliba (2016), scale efficiency has been realized in three different ways.

According to Abbasi and Kaviani (2016), operational efficiency is an organization's ability to produce high-quality products and services at a low cost. Ideal efficiency benchmarks are typically developed in a design laboratory under ideal operating conditions. Identifying the sources of efficiency loss between ideal and observed performance is extremely difficult. According to Abbasi and Kaviani (2016), relative operational efficiency (ROE) is defined as the ratio of actual throughput to best observed throughput.

Deane, Gallachóir, and McKeogh (2010) define operational efficiency as what happens when the right people, processes, and technology come together to improve the productivity and value of any business operation while driving down the cost of routine operations to the desired level. As a result, resources that were previously required to manage operational tasks can now be redirected to new, high-value initiatives that add new capabilities to the organization. Operational efficiency is concerned with minimizing waste and maximizing resource capabilities to provide customers with high-quality products and services. Operational efficiency aims to identify wasteful processes and resources that drain the organization's profits and maximize output delivery while minimizing input and delivery costs. A fundamental requirement here is a radical shift away from an input-oriented line-item incremental budget toward a prioritized, well-costed output-oriented budget (Sueyoshi & Goto, 2011).

From an enterprise perspective, Operational efficiency is an enterprise's ability to deliver products or services to customers in the most cost-effective way possible while maintaining the highest quality of its products, services, and support (Vangie, 2014). Operational efficiency is frequently achieved by streamlining a company's core processes to respond to constantly changing market forces (or social demands) more effectively and cost-effectively. To achieve operational efficiency, a company must reduce redundancy and waste while leveraging the resources that are most important to its success and making the best use of its workforce, technology, and business processes (Muriuki, 2015). Operation efficiency in the devolved unit is dependent on the following input: resource allocation, strategic direction, strategic control, and culture change, and all blended by integrity.

The definition of strategy reveals the role of resources in strategy. It was originally derived from the Greek word 'strategos', which means general. Strategy, therefore, can be described as an 'art of the general' (Steiner et al., 2012). Similarly, Sterling (2013) considered determining the firm's main long-term goals and targets, implementing methods of activities, and allocating critical resources to achieve these goals as a befitting strategy definition.

The aggregate deployment of resources must consider the organization's strategic goals, not just new ideas or initiatives under review. Factors influencing and ultimately forming a company's strategy emerge continuously from these intended and unexpected sources. Regardless of the source, they must pass through a common filter during the resource allocation process. This is because a company's actual strategy only manifests itself through the flow of new products, processes, services, and acquisitions to which resources are allocated. The resource allocation process functions as a filter, determining which intended or emerging initiatives receive funding to proceed and which proposals are denied resources (Sterling, 2013).

Planning, developing the budget with appropriate staff, seeking, allocating, and adjusting fiscal, human, and material resources, utilizing the physical plant, monitoring resource use, and reporting results are all part of resource allocation (Scott & Kelly, 2014). Resource allocation entails making choices and decisions about how scarce natural, labor, and capital inputs will be used or distributed among competing production ranges (Kennedy, Rae, Sheridan & Valadkhani, 2017). Most countries around the world have made health a right for their citizens. While high and some middle-income countries have made this a reality by providing equal resources to all. The majority of low-income countries continue to face enormous challenges and barriers to achieving equality for all.

By utilizing the administrative chain to the point at which services are provided, the devolved system has encouraged the need for balanced resource allocation (Tomaney, 2016). Devolution has required all managers at all levels to pay close attention to the government's objectives and goals, as well as to manage risks and become more responsive to the needs of citizens receiving services (Minbaeva, 2018). Kenya's devolution governance is one of the few in the world that shifts authority from the center to ensure that local administrations are established from the start. Kenya had over 100 districts prior to devolution, but authority was only exercised by the central government.

The Civil Service Programme was designed to be implemented in three phases: Phase 1 - cost containment; Phase 2 - performance improvement; and Phase 3 - consolidation and maintenance of reform initiatives' gains. While phases 1 and 2 successfully reduced the Civil Service workforce by 30% (from 272,000 in 1992 to 191,670 in 2003), productivity and performance remained a mirage. This paved the way for the implementation of Results-Based Management (RBM), which was guided by the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) for Wealth and Job Creation (Republic of Kenya, 2003). The Government began implementing the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) for Wealth and Employment Creation during the 2003-2007 Public Service Reforms (Republic of Kenya, 2003).

Another important driver of county government operation efficiency is integrity. Public servants relegate values such as integrity, ethics, and accountability to the background in the highly dynamic environment that characterizes the modern workplace and society at large while personal survival takes center stage. Even with dwindling resources and budget shortfalls, the county government is still expected to deliver, and this burden is passed on to public servants. When resources are scarce, such as during or after a conflict, the strain on resources and the strain on public services can pose an existential threat to citizens (UNDESA, 2016).

Unethical practices are, without a doubt, Kenya's most pressing governance and development challenge today. They have a crippling and corrosive effect on the continent's progress, stability, and development. They stifle economic growth by discouraging foreign investment, causing distortions in resource allocation and competitive markets, raising the cost of doing business, and lowering the net value of government spending. They also reduce the quality of services and public infrastructure, as well as the volume of tax revenues, and encourage misappropriation and misallocation of scarce resources (African Regional Anti-Corruption Programme, 2016).

Investigating and prosecuting corruption cases in Kenya's devolved government remains a work in progress. Corruption must be an almost insurmountable challenge, with the parties involved and the amounts involved growing with each expose (Olola, 2011). Despite a vigorous government campaign to eradicate the vice over the last few decades, corruption has increased significantly in both real numbers and perception. This suggests that the investigative or legal mechanisms used to combat the vice are ineffective. The increasing number of laws enacted to combat corruption has proven insufficient in containing or eliminating it, jeopardizing the viability of the country's development initiatives (EACC, 2017).

Strategic direction is the third strategic leadership consideration important for the current study. Determining the strategic direction of any organization is a critical role that must be properly led. Strategic direction setting is essential in organizations, according to Bryson (2011), and strategic planning can help leaders and managers of public and non-profit organizations think, learn, and act strategically. This viewpoint was supported by Toole (2010), who observed that strategic planning can be a critical step in achieving success for many non-profit organizations (Kitobga, 2016). The concept of strategic direction has been identified as a dominant issue that informs the foundation of many firms' global performance. Strategic direction is widely regarded as one of the most important drivers of firm performance. According to Shariff (2016), firm performance is a critical factor in determining an organization's success.

Strategic direction is critical for a company's performance and success (Nthini, 2013). This is because strategic direction essentially aids in charting the path that a firm will take in terms of profitability or loss. Various scholars around the world have demonstrated that strategic direction has a positive effect on firm performance (Gallos & Heifetz, 2008; Lai, 2017). In Africa, studies on the effect of strategic direction on firm performance in the manufacturing, small and medium-sized enterprises, and government sectors have revealed a positive influence (Nganga, 2013; Onu, 2018; Tinarwo, 2016). Abimbola (2017) suggested that future research should investigate other leadership styles and their implementation in many developing countries.

Strategic control is the third strategic leadership consideration important for the current study. Control activities are rules, procedures, and systems that guarantee management orders are followed correctly (Aikins, 2011; Rezaee, Elam & Sharbatoghlie, 2001). Proper documentation of policies and procedural standards in these areas not only helps to specify how control activities are to be carried out but also provides appropriate information for auditors to examine the overall sufficiency of control design over financial management operations (Aikins, 2011). These control operations ensure that all necessary steps are completed to handle risks and accomplish corporate objectives. Segregation of duties, the daily deposit of cash receipts, bank reconciliations, and limiting access to check stock are examples of control operations.

Internal control systems are generally considered to require proper monitoring to assess the quality and efficacy of the system's performance over time. Monitoring ensures that the conclusions of audits and other evaluations are determined as soon as possible. Theofanis et al. (2011) further stated that monitoring operations ensure the effectiveness of the internal controls system (Amudo & Inanga, 2009). As a result, monitoring assesses whether management's policies and processes are being carried out properly by personnel. Internal control systems, including internal audits, are designed to improve the dependability of financial performance, either directly or indirectly, by enhancing accountability among information suppliers within an organization (Jenning et al., 2008). Internal control serves a considerably broader purpose at the organizational level as a result. Internal controls give an impartial assessment of the quality of managerial performance in carrying out assigned obligations to generate more money (Donald & Delno, 2009).

The importance of organizational culture in establishing competitive advantages for business firms and its influence on organizational performance has been well-documented in the literature (Yesil & Kayab, 2013). More specifically, organizational culture directs an organization's activities, shaping how employees think, work, and feel (Gavric et al., 2016). However, organizational culture does not always have a positive impact on performance. Similarly, organizational culture is not static. The fact that organizational culture can be highly dynamic and have a negative impact on business operations emphasizes the importance of studying it (Gavric et al., 2016). As a result, organizational culture becomes the single most influential factor influencing organizational performance.

In order to achieve the goal of the investigation, the study set out the following objectives:

- To establish the influence of resource allocation on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo,
- To establish the influence of integrity on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo,
- To establish the influence of strategic directions on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo,
- To establish the influence of strategic control on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo and to establish the influence of organizational culture change on the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo

2. Literature

2.1. Theories Informing the Study

2.1.1. Resource-based Theory

In 1991, resource-based theory was developed (Barney, 1991). The resource-based perspective (RBV) emphasizes the firm's resources as the primary determinants of competitive advantage and performance. In analyzing sources of competitive advantage, it makes two assumptions (Barney, 2006; Peteraf& Barney, 2003). First, this model assumes that firms within an industry can be heterogeneous in terms of the resource bundle that they control. Second, it presumes that resource heterogeneity will persist over time because the resources used to implement firms' strategies are not perfectly mobile across firms (i.e., some resources are not traded in factor markets and are difficult to accumulate and imitate). Resource heterogeneity (or uniqueness) is considered a prerequisite for a resource bundle to contribute to a competitive advantage (Cool, Almeida Costa & Dierickx, 2002). However, the assumed heterogeneity and immobility are insufficient conditions for long-term competitive advantage.

According to Barney (2006), to be a source of sustained competitive advantage, a firm resource must also be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and seldom substitutable. The RBV has made many interesting contributions, including imitation with the concepts of isolating mechanisms (Kueng, 2010), time compression diseconomies, asset mass efficiencies, and causal ambiguity. Much recent resource-based research has concentrated on intangible assets such as information, knowledge, and dynamic capabilities (Mihm, 2010).

This theory is relevant to the study because resources are devolved to County Governments for the purpose of service delivery. It requires county governments to position themselves strategically based on their resources and capabilities to improve service delivery. This theory addressed the variable of resource allocation, which, when well-managed, leads to the operational efficiency of Baringo County governments.

2.1.2. Public Choice Theory

Geoffrey Brennan and James Buchanan (1985) developed this theory, which holds that the rules that govern individual behavior within a society are essential in determining the behavior of individuals and institutions within that society. According to the theory, corruption is an opportunistic trait that benefits a few at the expense of the larger society. According to public choice theory, corruption levels within a country have less to do with the personal values of its public servants and more to do with the institutional makeup of the country.

Proponents of public choice theory also believe that the behavior of those involved in corruption should be studied only in the context of larger institutional frameworks, laws, and regulations. While attempting to study and diagnose corruption in a country, failure to take this into account will result in a distorted picture. If lawmakers and anti-corruption bodies are to be successful in designing and implementing anti-corruption laws, they must be aware of the impact that existing rules have on the behavior of both citizens and public officials. To effectively address integrity, it is critical for county government employees to have high integrity in pursuit of operational efficiency. As a result, this theory served as the foundation for investigating the impact of integrity on the operational efficiency of the Baringo County government.

2.1.3. Contingency Theory

Contingency theory is not a new theory in organizational research because it has well-established concepts in organizational literature (Donaldson, 2001). Meanwhile, contingency theory has been the subject of a wider area of research for the past three decades, yet it is still developing. Contingency theory is known as one of those theories that have usually been used recently in management accounting and auditing research. Though, the utilization of the theory may have a different effect. Equally, its effectiveness depends upon the stage or field that is being proposed. Additionally, the relevance of any given factor should be contingent upon other factors (Krishnamoorthy, 2002). Then, therefore, contingency theory enables a researcher to introduce factors to explain or predict an expected phenomenon systematically. This is because its understanding depends on one's interpretation of the theory. Such a theory can produce accurate hypotheses and consistent functions (Schoonhoven, 1981).

There is a greater possibility of applying a contingency framework in the public sector (Wood, 2009). Moreover, a contingency theory also differs from other theories in the form of their specific propositions. This is because it hypothesizes a conditional relationship between two or more independent variables with a dependent variable and subjects it to an empirical test. Therefore, this study proposes strategic control at the Baringo County devolved level contingent upon those components of the effective internal control system.

2.1.4. Organizational Culture Model

The Curteanu and Constantin (2010) organizational culture model was used in this study. The model focuses on two cultural functions. This includes both external adaptation and internal integration. The model employs these two cultural functions to characterize various types of culture along a spectrum ranging from external to internal focus (external adaptation) and from stable to flexible (internal integration) (Curteanu& Constantin, 2010). As shown in figure 1, the framework generates four types of organizational culture dimensions: cooperating, innovating, harmonizing, and organizing.

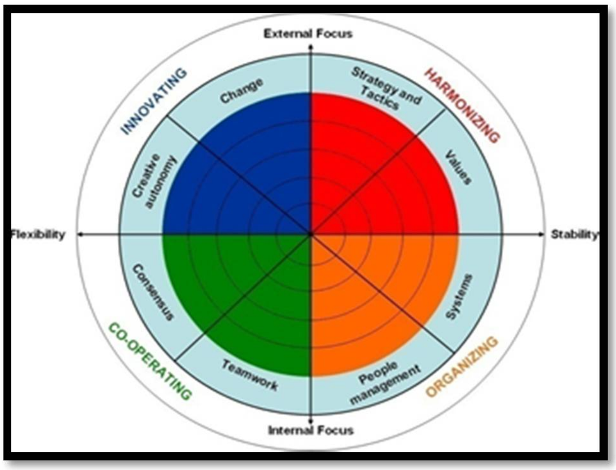

Figure 1: Framework Generates Four Types of Organizational Culture Dimensions: Cooperating, Innovating, Harmonizing, and Organizing

The dimension of cooperating culture is located between the internal focus and flexibility continuum. The cooperating culture emphasizes teamwork, dialogue, competency development, and providing a supportive environment for organization members to achieve external adaptability (Curteanu& Constantin, 2010). The model was adopted as the basis for analyzing culture change in the operation efficiency of the County Government in Kenya.

2.2. Empirical Review

2.2.1. Resource Allocation and Operational Efficiency

County governments are charged with various functions, all of which aim to maximize constituents' satisfaction while minimizing risks to their well-being. The imminent result of this is the development of several targets, all of which should be met. Some of these targets must be secured first because failing to meet them or risking failure comes with a high cost. A risk-based allocation strategy enables agencies to determine the most effective way to allocate the limited resources under their control to service and secure a wide range of risk exposures (Farrell, Gebre, Hudspeth, & Sellgren, 2013). Its proper implementation has the advantage of ensuring the delivery of essential and fundamental services that allow citizens to live in safe and predictable conditions and serve as the foundation for pursuing other goals.

A high level of resource utilization in one department of an organization should not be viewed as compensation for inefficient resource utilization in other departments (Garcia, Rabadi, & Handy, 2018). Determining the resources needed to achieve strategic goals is a difficult process.

The resource allocation recognizes actual task implementation time and pre-emptive scheduling (Hair, 2015). This is used to overcome the resource allocation challenge and improve resource utilization by using various modes of work capacities. However, estimating the execution time of an activity is a challenging task for a user, and mistakes frequently occur (Hipple, 2012). By considering communication resources, resource allocation based on response time, which is used as a measure of a utility function, is recommended (Aykan, 2017).

According to a study conducted in Pakistan by Hassan, Tabar, and Shabanzade (2010) on the challenges facing objective-based allocation strategies, the problem of allocating resources among various projects or business units to meet the expected objectives falls under the objectives resource allocation problem. Resources to achieve the objectives are scarce. According to Aykan (2017), the first step in this allocation strategy should be viewed as a strategic, policy-driven, and organizational signal that conforms to the programmatic perspective. This provides the organization with a good guide for the development of strategic goals, a more detailed costing of the expected results, and cross-checking of the outcomes based on the estimated budget (Koehler, 2018).

According to a Mayo (2014) study on workforce alignment to strategic objectives, there was a need to align the appropriate workforce to each strategic objective, and failure to do so resulted in a competitive disadvantage as others succeeded faster in this industry-wide shift. The study also discovered that strategies that did not necessitate full commitment included new organizational values, customer offerings, customer service, reorganization, facility amalgamation, alliances and partnerships, and marketing approaches.

Carrillo and Singhal (2015) discovered that policy objectives were viewed as the primary evaluation criteria for projects and programs. In their study on resource allocation with policy objectives, they established that evaluating the relative effectiveness of interventions other than subjective conditions was impossible in the absence of quantitative measures of effectiveness. There are three types of policies: fairness policies, greedy efficiency policies, and fair efficiency policies. According to a study conducted by Lee, Ford, and Joglekar (2018) on the effects of resource allocation policies on project durations, a minimum resource allocation delay does not result in minimum durations. On the other hand, increasing uncertainty decreases durations under certain conditions.

Mitton, Dionne, and Donaldson (2014) discovered that a priority-based approach helped to ensure a transparent priority-setting process. This allowed for stakeholder consultation on allocation recommendations, enabled public input to be incorporated, and was driven jointly by local opinion and available evidence. Another study conducted in Australia by Dionne, Mitton, Smith, and Donaldson (2008) on decision makers' perspectives on priority setting in the Vancouver Island Health Authority discovered that the key features of a desirable priority-setting process included:

- Baseline assessment,
- Use of best evidence,
- Clarity,
- Consistency,
- Clear and measurable criteria,
- Dissemination of information,
- Fair representation,
- Alignment with the strategic direction, and
- Evaluation of results

The study also discovered that the existing priority-setting processes lacked most of these desired features. Furthermore, respondents identified and explained several factors influencing resource allocation, such as political considerations, organizational culture, and capacity.

2.2.2. Integrity and Operational Efficiency

In their study, Aggrey and Benfort (2015) discovered that another operational framework that can be adopted to drive transparency and integrity in information sharing by the government includes equipping investigative agencies with enough manpower, legal tools, and operational resources so that when questions of integrity or ethics of public officials arise, these investigative agencies can adequately address them. Brookes (2015) found that procedural factors hampered the investigation and prosecution of unethical practices in the United Kingdom in his research on integrity and ethical practices in the United Kingdom. Brookes conducted a study on government agencies between 2010 and 2015. The study's respondents were government employees, and the findings indicated that procedural arrangements played a significant role in investigating and prosecuting corrupt individuals.

Brookes (2017) argues in his paper on governance and ethical practices that to enforce ethical standards in government, a structural governance structure that grants independence to each arm of government to ensure checks and balances is required. These checks and balances are especially important in managing financial resources, where they can be applied so that no single entity or individual has a monopoly on financial decisions. However, input is required from various independent offices.

Geoffrey (2015) discovered that strong institutions acted as a deterrent to unethical practices in the UK public sector in his study on factors influencing ethical behavior in public service. The study, which took place between 2010 and 2015, was consistent with previous research by Aggrey, Atkinson, and Barley (2014), which found that strong institutions acted as a deterrent to corrupt and unethical practices in the UK. Kimani (2015) asserted that a society's level of moral decadence influenced not only its level of corruption but also its fight against corruption and unethical practices. He argued that when a society is morally decadent, the acceptance level of social ills rises, and things that were previously deemed unacceptable become much more acceptable. He claimed that this influenced investigations and even prosecutions of graft cases.

2.2.3. Strategic Direction and Operational Efficiency

Locally, Ogechi and Nyamu (2016) discovered that strategic direction influenced firm performance in Kenyan Small and Medium Enterprises, whereas Nthini (2013) discovered that strategic direction was critical in contributing to the performance of Kenyan commercial and financial state corporations. Respondents agreed that their institutions had a high net profit margin or return on sales due to strategic management practices. The scope of the study was limited to commercial and financial state corporations, hence resulting in a research gap. Nganga (2013) conducted a study that discovered a high linear relationship between manufacturing firm performance and strategic direction. He discovered that firms that had leveraged strategic direction could withstand the industry's economic challenges and align themselves to achieve competitive advantage.

Strategic direction is critical in an organizational setting because it affects how well the firm's operations are managed on a day-to-day basis. It entails aligning the company's overall purpose with the vision, or the big picture of the company, and how it supports performance. Ernst and Young (2008) conducted a study in Ireland to determine the extent to which companies that adopted strategic direction outperformed their competitors. The chosen design was a cross-sectional survey, and both numerical and narrative data were sought. The opinions for the analysis were solicited from both managerial and non-management staff. The study concluded that strategic direction has a significant impact on the organization.

Waiganjo and Njeru (2017) conducted a study on strategic direction and its interaction with performance using evidence from government agencies operating in Kenya's tourism sector. The data gathered had both qualitative and quantitative attributes from four hundred and twenty (420) respondents. It was averred that strategic direction and firm performance are inextricably linked. Moreover, it was posited that staff at the lower levels were less involved in the formulation of strategies but rather in the implementation phase. However, this study concentrated on tourism-related government agencies rather than county governments, therefore presenting a knowledge gap.

Munyao, Chiroma, and Ongeti (2020) carried out research on the relationship between strategic direction and performance in reference to Africa Inland Church in Kenya. Questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to collect data. A positive and significant relationship was found between strategic direction and the institution's ability to perform. This study, however, was conducted in a church setting rather than with the county governments, creating a contextual gap.

2.2.4. Strategic Control and Operational Efficiency

Mwakimasinde, Odhiambo, and Byaruhanga (2014) investigated the impact of internal control systems on the financial performance of Kenyan sugarcane out-grower firms. The study determined that the internal control system was defined by the control environment, risk assessment process, information system, and control activities. On the other hand, financial performance was defined by cost per unit, goal attainment, and profitability or surplus. Kamau (2014) studied the impact of internal controls on the financial performance of Kenyan manufacturing enterprises. The data demonstrated that most manufacturing businesses had a controlled environment as one of the organizational internal controls, which had a significant impact on the firms' financial performance. The findings also found that employees were taught to apply accounting and financial management systems and that the security system identified and safeguarded organizational assets. Palfi and Muresan (2009) investigated the significance of a well-organized system of internal control in the banking industry, namely credit institutions in Romania. The survey responses suggested that an efficient internal audit department is distinguished by constant coordination, based on monthly meetings, among all bank structures.

Ndiwa (2014) investigated the impact of internal control systems on financial performance in Kenyan tertiary training institutions. Many public institutions in Kenya are experiencing poor financial performance, which has resulted in the closure of some of them despite having the requisite means to operate. As a result, the study attempted to explore the persistently bad financial performance from the standpoint of hitherto neglected internal controls. The study's overarching goal was to determine the relationship between internal control and financial performance in Kenyan tertiary institutions.

Mawanda (2008) investigated the effects of internal control on the performance of Uganda's higher learning institutions. The researcher sought to ascertain the relationship between the financial performance of institutions of higher learning and their internal control systems. The study sought to identify the causes of poor financial performance. According to the study's findings, internal audit has a significant impact on financial performance.

In the United States of America, Aikins (2008) investigated the role of government internal audits in improving financial management. The goal was to assess how government audits contribute to improved financial performance in government ministries. According to the study, internal audit is critical in financial performance and hence should not be interfered with by senior officials. The study found that internal auditing significantly impacts the financial performance of government ministries.

Amudo and Inanga (2009) investigated the impact of internal control systems on Ugandan public sector projects. The research focused on 14 African Development Bank Group-sponsored projects. 11 projects were deemed operational and possessed the necessary information for the study. The study discovered that risk management significantly impacted the performance of banks' projects. While the foregoing study concentrated on Ugandan banks, the current study focuses on internal controls in county governments.

2.2.5. Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

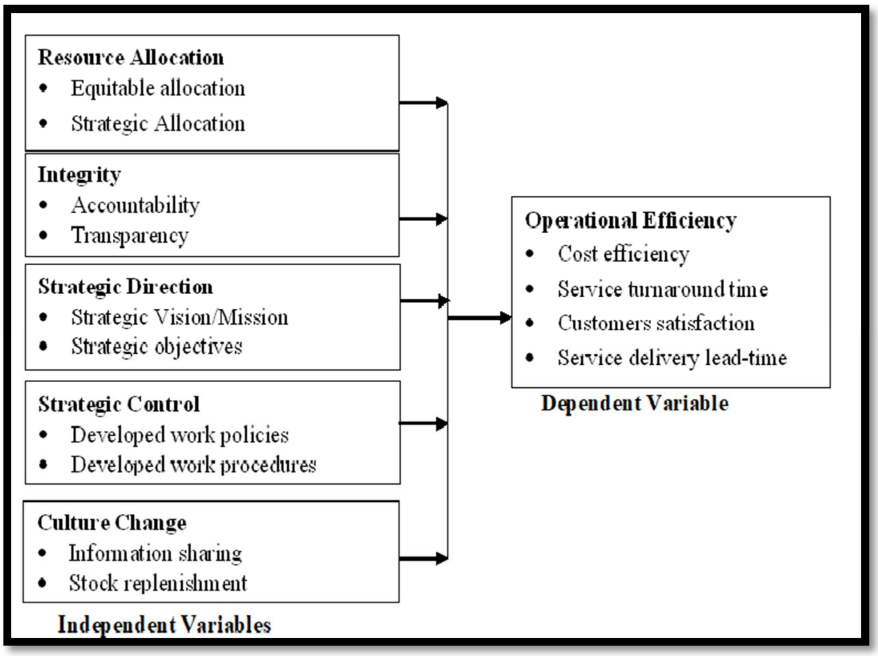

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

The research design that the study adopted is a descriptive research design. The target population of the study will be the 33 members of top management (Sectoral County Chief Officers and County Directors) in the County Government of Baringo. The justification for the choice of the County Chief Officers and County Directors is that they are directly involved in the implementation of the county government's strategic plan and operations under their dockets. Secondly, the operations of the devolved government are in the hands of the Chief Officers and County Directors. The researcher took a census of all the thirty-three County Chief Officers and County Directors by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Their personal physical addresses were used to arrange how the questionnaires were delivered and collected back.

The researcher used close-ended questions based on Likert Scale as the main mode of data collection. The use of questionnaires was justified because they assured an effective way of collecting information from a population in a short period of time and at a reduced cost. The questionnaires also facilitated easier coding and analysis of the data collected (Kothari, 2004). The closed-ended questions ensured that the respondents were restricted to certain categories in their responses for easy data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The questionnaires were personally dropped and picked after one day by the researcher for purposes of a higher response rate. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Strategic leadership influence on operation efficiency was tested with the Regression Model in equation (1),

$y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + P_5 x_5 + \varepsilon$ .... (1).

Where the symbols of the formula above are explained below:

Y= Operation Efficiency; α =constant; $\beta_1 \ldots\ldots \beta_5$ = parameter estimates; X_1= Resource Allocation; X_2 =Integrity; X_3 = Strategic Direction; X_4 = Strategic Control; X_5 = Culture Change ε = the error of prediction.

4. Findings

4.1. Individual Elements of Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency is the hope of any government in its endeavor to provide the necessary services to its citizens. In this investigation, the researcher analyzed the effect of the following cause variables on operational efficiency:

- Resource allocation to operations,
- Integrity in running the operations,
- Strategic direction in achieving operations efficiency,
- Strategic control in achieving operations efficiency and culture change in achieving operations efficiency

The regression results of the above-mentioned case variables are presented in table 1. The results are presented in terms of the beta coefficient, the p-value, and R squared.

Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	P value	R^2
Resource Allocation Variables			
Constant	0.946	0.000	0.560
Equitable resource allocation	0.154	0.003	0.560
Priority-based resource allocation	0.160	0.000	0.560
Strategic resource allocation	0.102	0.004	0.560
Integrity and Ethics Variables			
Constant	1.539	0.000	0.274
Ethical operative laws	0.514	0.000	0.274
Goodwill from the citizen	0.165	0.050	0.274
Work environment of integrity	0.338	0.000	0.274
Ethical policy implementation	0.298	0.001	0.274
Lifestyle audit for employees	0.198	0.033	0.274
Strategic Direction Variable			
Constant	4.492	0.000	0.353
Long term vision	0.148	0.003	0.353
Functional strategic plan	0.228	0.014	0.353
Staff core competencies	0.992	0.000	0.353
Strategic Control Variables			
Constant	1.371	0.000	0.596
Operational business units	0.187	0.000	0.596
Internal control mechanisms	0.402	0.000	0.596
Organization Culture Variables			
Constant	0.892	0.000	0.644
unifying goals and objectives at work	0.140	0.001	0.644
well-structured staff development plan	0.134	0.001	0.644
Citizen participation in projects	0.100	0.010	0.644
Accountability at work	0.098	0.015	0.644
Customer-centered solutions	0.153	0.000	0.644

Table 1: Influence of Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

The sub-variables under resource allocation included equitable, priority-based, and strategic resource allocation. The study established a significant positive relationship (β = 0.946, p=0.000) between equitable resource allocation and operational efficiency. Secondly, the study also established significant positive relation (β = 0.154, p=0.003) between priority-based resource allocation and operational efficiency. Thirdly, the study established significant positive relation (β = 00.160, p=0.000) between strategic resource allocation and operational efficiency. Therefore, there was empirical evidence to prove that resource application influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. These findings were congruent with the findings of the study by Lee, Ford, and Joglekar (2018). They established that a minimum resource allocation delay does not result in minimum durations, and increasing uncertainty decreases durations under certain conditions. This is further supported and corroborated by Mitton, Dionne, and Donaldson (2014). They established that a priority-based approach helped to ensure a transparent priority-setting process, which allowed for stakeholder consultation of allocation recommendations, which enabled public input to be incorporated, and was driven jointly by local opinion and available evidence.

Findings on integrity and ethics are based on the following variables:

- Ethical operative laws,
- Goodwill from the citizen,
- Work environment integrity,
- Ethical policy implementation and
- Lifestyle audit on employees

First, concerning ethical operative laws, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.592, p=0.000) between equitable ethical operative laws and operation efficiency. Secondly, concerning goodwill from the citizen, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.165, p=0.050) between goodwill from the citizen and operation efficiency. Thirdly, concerning work environment integrity, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.338, p=0.000) between work environment integrity and operational efficiency. Furthermore, findings on ethical policy implementation established a significant positive relation (β = 0.298, p=0.001) between ethical policy implementation and operation efficiency. Lastly, on lifestyle audit on employees, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.198, p=0.033) between lifestyle audit on employees and operation efficiency. These findings, therefore, are the basis of empirical evidence to prove that integrity and ethical issues influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. The findings of this study on integrity are consistent with what Geoffrey (2015) found out that strong institutions acted as a deterrence to unethical practices in the UK public sector.

Further findings on the strategic direction were analyzed based on the following variables:

- Long-term vision,
- Functioning strategic plan, and
- Staff core competencies

First, concerning long-term vision, the study established positive relation of significance (β = 0.148, p=0.003) between long-term vision and operation efficiency. Secondly, on functioning strategic plan, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.228, p=0.014) between functioning strategic plan and operation efficiency. Thirdly, on staff core competencies, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.992, p=0.000) between functioning strategic plans and operation efficiency. These findings, therefore, are the basis of empirical evidence to prove that strategic direction influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. This finding is supported by Nthini (2013), who discovered that strategic direction was critical in contributing to the performance of Kenyan commercial and financial state corporations. The finding is further supported by Nganga (2013), who found that firms that had leveraged strategic direction were predisposed to withstand the economic challenges affecting the industry and were better aligned to achieve competitive advantage.

Findings on strategic control were based on the following variables analyzed: operational business units and internal control mechanisms. Concerning operational business units, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.187, p=0.000) between operational business units and operation efficiency. Secondly, on the internal control mechanism, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.402, p=0.000) between the internal control mechanism and operation efficiency. These findings, therefore, are the basis of empirical evidence to prove that strategic control influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. These findings resonate well with what Mwakimasinde, Odhiambo, and Byaruhanga (2014) found. They established that the internal control system was defined by the control environment, risk assessment process, information system, and control activities. They further stated that financial performance was defined by cost per unit, goal attainment, and profitability or surplus.

Findings on organizational cultural change were based on the following analyzed variables:

- Unifying goals and objectives at work,
- Well-structured staff development plan,
- Citizen participation in projects,
- Accountability at work, and
- Customer-centered solutions

Concerning unifying goals and objectives at work, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.140, p=0.001) between unifying goals and objectives at work with respect to operational efficiency. On a well-structured staff development plan, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.134, p=0.001) between a well-structured staff development plan and operation efficiency. Concerning citizen participation in projects, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.100, p=0.010) between citizen participation in projects and operation efficiency. On accountability at work, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.098, p=0.015) between accountability at work and operation efficiency. Last, concerning the customer-centered solution, the study established a significant positive relation (β = 0.153, p=0.000) between customer-centered solution and operation efficiency. These findings, therefore, are the basis of empirical evidence to prove that organizational culture change as an element of strategic leadership influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo.

4.2. Combined Elements of Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

The researcher used multivariate regression analysis to analyze the combined elements of strategic leadership and operational efficiency, as presented in table 2.

Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	P value	R^2
Constant	1.333	0.000	0.738
Resource Allocation	0.320	0.000	0.738
Integrity and Ethics	0.089	0.006	0.738
Strategic Direction	0.020	0. 953	0.738
Strategic Control	0.537	0.000	0.738
Culture change	0.239	0.003	0.738

Table 2: Combined Influence of Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

Based on multivariate regression results presented in table 2, the study revealed a significant positive relation (β = 0.320, p=0.000) between resource allocation in projects and operation efficiency. Secondly, on integrity and ethics, the findings revealed a significance positive relation (β = 0.089, p=0.006) between integrity and ethics and operation efficiency. Thirdly, concerning the strategic direction, the findings revealed an insignificant relationship (β = 0.020, p=0.953) between strategic direction and operation efficiency. Fourthly, on strategic control, the findings revealed a significant positive relation (β = 0.537, p=0.000) between strategic control and operational efficiency. Lastly, regarding organizational culture change, the findings revealed a significant positive relation (β = 0.239, p=0.003) between integrity and ethics with respect to operational efficiency. Based on the significant influence of resource allocation, integrity, ethics, strategic control, and organizational culture change on operational efficiency is presented in table 2. Therefore, the researcher concludes that strategic leadership influences the operational efficiency of the County Governments in Kenya, taking the case of Baringo County.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study's main objective was to establish the influence of strategic leadership on the operational efficiency of the County Governments in Kenya, taking the case of Baringo County. First, the study established that there was sufficient empirical evidence to prove that resource allocation influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Secondly, there was empirical evidence to prove that integrity and ethical issues influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Thirdly, the study established empirical evidence to prove that strategic control influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo. Lastly, the study further established empirical evidence to prove that organizational culture influenced the operational efficiency of the County Government of Baringo.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusions on the influence of strategic leadership on the organizational efficiency of Baringo County, the study came up with the following recommendations to enhance operational efficiency in Baringo County, as in the case of the devolved governance system in Kenya. This section of the study discusses the recommendation as opined by the findings.

The Auditor General is entrusted with the role of examining, inquiring into, and auditing the accounts of all accounting officers and receivers of revenue and all persons entrusted with public finances both at the National and County level in Kenya. This role was also assigned to the Office of Auditor General so that it could enforce, within the law, that all reasonable precautions have been taken to safeguard the collection of public money. The guiding principle here is that the laws, directions, and instructions relating to public finance management have been duly observed. It also emphasizes that all issues and payments should be made in accordance with proper authority. In addition, all payments should be properly charged and supported by sufficient vouchers or proof of payment. The rule of thumb dictates that all money expended should be applied to the purposes for which the same was granted by County Assembly and relevant laws and regulations. Such expenditures should conform to the authority which governs them and should be incurred with due regard to the avoidance of waste and devoid of extravagance while ensuring that all essential records are maintained. The rules and procedures that will be framed and applied in public finance management should be sufficient to safeguard the control of inventory and assets, and other public property. Results from this study point to the general direction of this critical role of the Auditor General. Therefore, findings are critical to updating the auditing policy of the County Governments, by the office of the Auditor General, as a means of helping the County Governments to achieve more operational efficiency for efficient service delivery and ensure value for money in the County Governments of Kenya.

The role of the County Assembly in public finance management in Kenya is very important at the county government level. The County Assembly is one of the arms of the county government alongside the County Executive. The County Assembly plays the role of public finance management through the County Budget and Appropriations Committee. The Assembly also plays the oversight role of county finances in Kenya. In this role, the Committee discusses and reviews the County Fiscal Strategy Paper, the Budget Estimates, and the Finance Bill and make recommendations to the County Assembly, examines financial statements and other documents submitted to the County Assembly and makes recommendations to the County Assembly for improving the management of the county's public finances, investigate, inquire into and report on all matters related to coordination, control, and monitoring of the county budget.

The County Assemblies will find the relevance of the findings from the study to legislate laws that will enable the County Governments to be more operationally efficient. Such a law should include resource allocations and internal control principles. County senior managers owe development partners and stakeholders fiduciary responsibility in public finance management to ensure continuity of financing and other resource support to county programs crafted for public good and alleviation of human suffering. The rules governing persons occupying a fiduciary role form a dynamic area of law and practice. With deep historical roots, fiduciary relations have expanded beyond the established categories such as trust-beneficiary, agent-principal, or director-corporation to include any person who has power or discretion over another's interests. This is coupled with an express or implied undertaking to act exclusively in the other's service and interest. County Chief Officers and County Directors, being senior managers charged with investment portfolios, are subject to fiduciary laws with strict requirements and controls. Therefore, the findings from this study are relevant to inform their undertaking.

For practice, the County Governments in Kenya should use the findings to develop an operational matrix based on resource allocation, strategic control, strategic direction, and organizational culture change that can ensure the more efficient running of the core activities of the County Governments.

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