Effect of deployment of strategic leadership in the horticulture industry: a case study of selected flower farms in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The paper reports empirical findings drawn from a study undertaken to understand the dimensions of strategic leadership deployed among flower farms and the benefits that the flower farms have derived from deployment of strategic leadership. The context was selected due to its significance in contributing to the national economy and the level of turbulence experienced by the farms that requires a leadership style entrenching strategic thinking. 43 flower farms were sampled and primary data obtained using a structured questionnaire from CEOs, Deputy CEOs and heads of functional areas. Two dimensions of strategic leadership have been deployed to a low extent while two have been implemented to a moderate extent. The deployed dimensions of strategic leadership have significantly contributed to the flower farms performance by enhancing their capacity to attain growth at the rate of 15-20%. The study concluded that strategic leadership is relevant for deployment by the flower farms and raised implications for its deployment among organizations facing complex and turbulent environments. The paper called on future research to consider expanding the scope of the context of the investigation and conceptualization of the dimensions of strategic leadership based on other relevant theoretical frameworks anchoring strategic leadership.

Introduction

The strategic management literature acknowledges the role of leadership in the strategic management process. Diverse authors agree on the components of the strategic management process and point to the implied areas of the process where leadership plays a critical role (Pearce, Robison & Mital, 2012; Haberberg & Rieple, 2010). It is clear from the literature that leadership comes into the process during the stages that initiate the process and continues to play its critical roles in all the phases including the final phase that ensures implementation and monitoring of the entire strategic management process (Pearce, Robison & Mital, 2012; Haberberg & Rieple, 2010). These roles are associated with that highlighted in the management literature that has approached leadership as a subset of the function of directing that seeks to harness the contribution of both leaders and followers towards attainment of organizational goals (Kauffman CPT, 2017). Thus, viewed from this lens, leadership is indispensable to an organization's success. However, the nature of leadership varies from organization to another (Alhyasat & Sharif, 2018). The scholarship on leadership has expanded its scope of focus especially in considering the various types of leadership when leaders exercise power as they seek to achieve organizational goals through the efforts of followers. A large body of literature documents the recent attempts that present this expanded scope of different styles of leadership (Eva, et.al 2019). Among those that the literature has continued to give emphasis especially in regard to the strategic management process is the strategic leadership style. Scholars have pointed at the unique attributes of strategic leadership that associate it with a focus on the thinking and decision-making processes that allow the creation and implementation of an organization's strategic plan. In this sense, strategic leaders come to stage to inspire their teams to make autonomous decisions, which benefits the company’s long-term health without jeopardizing
its immediate bottom line (Nahak & Ellitan, 2022) as it contributes to the growth of human and societal capacities, hence enhancing and boosting organizational performance. Performance in an organization focuses on transforming inputs into outputs in order to reach a predetermined end. Regardless of market competition, organizations continually aim to improve performance and achieve their goals (Arslan & Staub, 2013). It is the role of the organization’s leaders to not only implement plans to enhance organizational performance, but also to attain the maximum degree of performance that was intended (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019).

Thus, strategic leadership confers an organization with the ability to predict the future, plan for it, and adapt to it, while motivating workers at all levels to pursue goals both short-term and long-term (Cortes & Herrmann, 2021). Strategic leaders link the organization’s strategic management process to the organization’s strategic plan. Organizations that practice strategic leadership respect their leadership role and long-term vision (Adair, 2010). The ideal method for challenging conventional management methods, mitigating risks, scaling the business, and enhancing the overall organizational performance is to select the appropriate strategic leadership techniques for the firm (Stowell & Mead, 2016). This means that the way in which strategic leaders think corresponds to how they lead and perform. The attitude of a strategic leader displays strategic agility, the ability to see how the past, present, and future are interconnected. According to Taylor (2018), strategic leaders must possess particular qualities in order to enhance performance. A strategic leader, for instance, should be a visionary and a strategic thinker. These leaders are goal-oriented and focused on important duties. In addition a strategic leader must translate the organization’s long-term goal into everyday objectives (Ambilichu, Omotoso & Yekini, 2022).

According to Mahdi and Almsafir, (2014), the contemporary organization’s innovative competitive environment necessitates adoption of strategic leadership skills as under such settings, executives are required to deploy strategic leadership to build their organization’s vision, thus allowing them to remain competitive in an ever-changing economic and technical environment (Stowell & Mead, 2016). In line with the reasoning of the top echelon school, there has been bias in the focus of the composition of the strategic leadership in organizations thus narrowing to the top management in the corporate level as those that comprise the team of interest in strategic leadership (Lord, Caldwell, Kass, & Devlin, 2016). This team is a small handful of executives that are ultimately accountable for the key decisions of the entire company. It has been pointed that even though contemporary businesses have a number of challenges, the most critical of these is that arising from a lack of strategic leadership. The reason for this is that strategic leadership goes beyond merely showing interest in the group and instead requires the leader to construct a vision that articulates the group’s purpose. In addition, Wakhisi (2021) and Ambilichu et al. (2022) argue that the decisions taken by strategic leaders affect organizational performance. The authors cited this scarcity of strategic leadership in organizations as an invitation to explore experiences of different sectors to establish the state of strategic leadership deployed in pursuing the strategic agenda of the organizations.

This study was done in the horticulture industry in Kenya. The sector is a significant contributor to the nations GDP as it comprises sectors that deal with fruit and flower farming. Global developments in major markets for the sector have raised the level of turbulence experienced in this sector such that the management of the industry has to consider deployment of a leadership that embraces strategic thinking. Thus, strategic leadership being a style of leadership that seeks to predict about the future, plan and adapt to it was considered suitable for investigation into the extent it has been adopted by the managers in the sector and the effect it has brought on performance of firms in this sector. Due to the diversity of the horticulture sector, the researchers focused on the flower farming sub sector in Kenya as it has grown into being the most critical sector accounting for a high percentage of employment creation and contribution towards annual national revenue earnings to the tune of $1.15 billion. The sector has however experienced rapid change in the last couple of years arising from developments in the major markets touching on anti-dumping and countervailing restrictions, exchange and financial controls, and tariff and non-tariff barriers (Tulezi, 2019). Locally, the Kenyan flower industry has been subjected to a number of additional costs and regulations (Kurere, 2018) and is often fraught with potential dangers, and international competition. The preparedness of the industry to respond and adapt to the environmental conditions requires empirical investigation to establish how strategic leadership has been deployed and the contribution it is likely to have brought into the individual firms’ performance. The study therefore sought to answer two questions: What dimensions of strategic leadership have been deployed in the flower firm industry in Kenya? How have the flower farms benefited from the deployment of this style of leadership?

The research makes a contribution to the body of knowledge in strategic management and leadership. First, the study approaches the concept from a strategic thinking lens to infuse aspects of the strategic management process into the deployment of strategic leadership. In line with this, the current study expands the scope of conceptualization of the dimensions of strategic leadership to integrate dimensions of the strategic management process that embed strategic thinking in the manner leadership is deployed in managing organizations. The extant research on diverse aspects of strategic leadership though clear on the relationship between strategic leadership and performance has missed to demonstrate how strategic thinking is embedded in the strategic leadership process (Gartenberg, Prat, & Serafeim, 2016; Bore, 2022). Secondly, the study investigates a critical sector that is of interest to policy makers due to its economic contribution. Even though there has been a considerable empirical effort towards explaining the role played by strategic leadership in organizations in different sectors, such an effort has not addressed the horticulture industry. Undertaking research in this sector is important to scholars and policy makers due to its global nature of the business and scope of environmental factors accounting for the experienced level of turbulence and the implications for policy makers on deploying appropriate strategic
orientation for enhancing viability of the sector. Thus the findings of this study contribute towards a better understanding on the role of strategic infused type of leadership will play in managing local operations for a sector supporting a highly turbulent global market.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

The study relied on the postulates of the strategic leadership theory whose philosophy evolved over time and in various circumstances. It was established by Finkelstein (Finkelstein et al., 2009) and it has been updated as the concern on leadership continues to grow in both developed and the emerging economies. The theory explains the emerging call and place for strategic leadership deployment as those developments connected with environmental change that raise the need to ensure strategic fit. The environmental change arises from the dynamic and complex nature of today’s markets, as well as the advancement in information technology and government regulation of innovation and adaptation by businesses. In the contemporary setting, management needs to engage in finding ways that can deliver satisfaction to top management as a key aspect of their mandate. Strategic leaders find their place through stakeholder based initiatives that will lead to innovations in response to opportunities.

Key themes addressed by the strategic leadership theory revolve around: the nature of strategic leadership, context of application and roles of the strategic leaders. Battacharyya and Jha (2018) in a comprehensive review of extant literature point that strategic leadership is distinguished by the manner in which it exercises influence over followers to direct their efforts towards achieving firm level goals, by adopting a holistic approach to the management of organizations, establishing long term goals through mission and vision, acquiring, developing and nurturing resources and capabilities for sustainable competitive advantage, networking and providing direction. Further, in terms of the context for its application, Battacharyya and Jha (2018) and Tipuric (2022) outline the key components characterizing the context that invite application of strategic leadership. They suggest that developments in market dynamism, regulatory framework, technological change, cultural adaptation, and globalization in most industries set the stage for the adoption of strategic leadership in bridging the gap between strategic direction and strategic action.

Regarding the role played by strategic leadership, Tipuric (2022) identified several of these roles that revolve around helping organizations generate the ability to handle complex problems in a high stake contextual setting and for injecting coordination efforts that establish the framework for fulfilling organizational mission towards attaining the desired future, helping to face uncertainty and complexity by enhancing adaptability to change, mobilization of human resources and social capital for the organization and engaging members. Out of these arguments about the theory of strategic leadership, a number of constructs that operationalize strategic leadership have been adopted in research (Bore, 2022; Sritoomma & Janjira, 2021; Kurzhals, Graf-Vlachy & König, 2020.). In this study, the authors identified four constructs of setting purpose or direction, building core competences, building organizational culture and leadership networking as dimensions of strategic leadership so as to establish how they have been deployed in the flower farms. Each is discussed in the empirical review of the literature leading to the research hypotheses.

**Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development**

This section provides a brief conceptual and empirical review of the four constructs drawn from the theory of strategic leadership that the authors adopted as the operational indicators of the construct of strategic leadership. A brief description of the nature of each indicator is provided and a summary of some empirical attempts made towards investigating the application of the constructs in diverse sectors.

**Setting Direction and Performance**

Setting strategic direction entails unleashing the organization's purposeful energy. The purpose of an organization can be explained by the interaction of four fundamental management tools: missions, competencies, objectives, and process. The organizational purpose relates to the duties and responsibilities of employees, their accomplishments, and organizational behaviour (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). The organizational purpose offers an organization its raison d'être by assisting it in discovering that which inherently energizes, excites, and motivates it to move forward (van Ingen, Peters, Ruiter & Robben, 2021). Henderson and Van den Steen (2015) state that, a company's true goal is to fulfill its organizational mission for which the organizational capacity for the required orientation calls upon management to translate a strategy to ensure there is some match between personnel and organizational goals to generate necessary initiative for goal achievement and provide the human talent as hallmarks of strategic leadership.

This purpose frequently extends beyond maximizing of profits. This definition indicates that an organization's purpose is not just its formal mission statement. Rather, it is a collection of shared values that drive the activities of the workforce. Therefore, a company's actions and decisions are guided by its fundamental mission. Strategic leaders activate corporate purpose by persuading employees of the mission and vision statements in the workplace (Rey, Bastons, & Sotok, 2019).

Individuals and teams engage in strategic leadership when they think, act, and exert influence in ways that support the organization's long-term competitive advantage (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). Strategic leaders compel the mission and vision statements in a working environment to activate organizational purpose (Rey, Bastons, & Sotok, 2019). Setting strategic direction means releasing the organizational power of purpose. Missions, competencies, objectives, and process are the four fundamental management tools that interact to explain the purpose of an organization. The organizational purpose is the "what and how," and it relates to the
accomplishments, organizational behaviour, and employee roles and duties (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). By assisting the organization in identifying what naturally energizes, stimulates, motivates, and inspires the organization to continue forward, the organizational mission offers the organization its reason for being (van Ingen, Peters, Ruitter & Robben, 2021).

Several dimensions of setting organizational direction have been investigated in empirical work.

Nthini (2015) evaluated the effect of strategic leadership on performance in the banking industry in Kenya and found a positive relationship. Odita and Bello (2015) focused on the effect of strategic direction and purpose on performance in the banking sector and found a positive relationship between dimensions of strategic direction and performance of the banks. Gartenberg, Prat, and Serafeim (2016) investigated how corporate purpose contributes to financial purpose among US corporations and reported a positive effect of organizational purpose on performance. Another study done in the higher education sector investigated the effect of vision and purpose on organizational performance at Kenyan private institutions (Jonyo, Ouma, & Mosoti, 2018). It obtained data from members of the top echelon of the universities and reported a positive relationship. Abashe (2016) looked into the impact that strategic leadership has on strategy execution in Kenya’s commercial banks using indicators of choice of direction over time, the use of available information in making decisions, and the regular review of progress. The study found a positive correlation between long-term goal-setting, data-driven decision making, and strategy execution. Otieno and Lewa (2020) used the components of strategic direction, strategic ethical practices, strategic control and developing human capital in relating with performance of the maritime sector and found a positive correlation with performance. Kurzhals et al. (2020) reviewed a broad range of empirical literature and found evidence of a positive relationship between the characteristics of strategic leadership and performance.

In view of the conceptual and empirical arguments supporting a positive relationship between components of strategic direction and performance, the study proposes that in the horticulture sector, deployment of components of setting direction and purpose will positively contribute to performance of the flower farms. Thus, hypothesis 1 is stated:

**H1: Deployment of components of setting direction and purpose as a component of strategic leadership among the flower farms by the managers will have a significant positive statistical effect on performance of the flower farms.**

**Creating corporate culture and Performance**

The need for corporate culture as a component of strategic leadership arises from the need to create a work environment that employees enjoy coming to every day by fostering a positive corporate culture that emphasizes the organization’s values and mission. The ideas, norms, and practices that make up an organization’s distinct social and psychological climate are what constitute its culture. Organizational culture is essential for showcasing the cultural behaviors that make the organization productive and appealing as a workplace, as well as for reinforcing the values and mission of the organisation (Metwally et al., 2019). Several attempts have been made on investigating the role of diverse aspects of corporate culture on organizations. Nthini (2013) in the study assessing the impact of strategic leadership on the efficiency of financial state corporations in Kenya operationalized corporate culture using clarity of corporate goals, well managed portfolio of resources, commitment to ethics and having a system of checks and balances. The study found that corporate culture had an impact on the efficiency of the commercial and financial state corporations in Kenya. Using the case study of the telecom industry, Ahmed and Shafiq (2014) investigated the effect of company culture on productivity. The primary objective of the research was to examine the connection between company culture and performance in order to learn how one can use company culture to their advantage. The study reported a positive effect.

Joseph and Kibera (2019)'s study sought to determine the impact of organizational culture on performance in the microfinance sector using licensed institutions in Kenya. The study found that the two most prevalent cultural typologies in the microfinance sector are clan and hierarchy. The findings demonstrated that organizational culture significantly influences non-market performance. The market culture was found to inversely relate with debt/equity ratio. This implies that the market culture positively influences financial performance and is an indicator of a firm’s financial sustainability. By employing a sample of 301 SMEs and with the managers and owners as the respondents, Nyamao (2016) demonstrated that strategic leadership can boost productivity in SMEs in Kenya. AlShehhi (2021) investigated the role that company culture played to firm success using businesses in UAE. In order to prioritize certain identifiers and indicators of the connection between organizational culture and performance in the context of the UAE, the study used interviews with experts and questionnaires. The study found a correlation between company culture and productivity. Ma and Seidl (2017) in their study focusing on how CEOs create a system of collaborators from among their subordinates identified the role of organizational culture in establishing teams for supporting the CEO.

The findings on the relationship between organization culture and performance was used as the basis for the relationship between building organization culture as a dimension of strategic leadership and performance of the horticulture industry. Given that the studies support a positive relationship between culture and performance, the study proposed that building organization culture would have a positive effect on performance and thus hypothesis two was stated as:

**H2: Deployment of components of building organizational culture as a component of strategic leadership among the flower farms by the managers will have a significant positive statistical effect on performance of the flower farms.**
Developing core competences and Performance

The development and upkeep of core competencies rely heavily on human capital, which includes employees as well as their knowledge, skills, and ideas. Building one's technical, social, political, and leadership abilities is the bedrock of core competencies. A strategic leader who has developed their sense of perspective can effectively use the long view to the here and now. Human, intellectual, financial, and social capital combine to form an organization's core capabilities, as stated by Ireland and Hitt (2010). These abilities become drivers of competitiveness when accompanied by the attributes of being highly prized, rare, and difficult to imitate. However, a company's essential capabilities must change as the external environment and the business or sector do (Kohnová et al., 2019). According to Hamdan et al. (2020), a leader’s role is to determine which skills are most important in attaining the mission of the organization so that the organization can take the necessary steps to develop, preserve, and employ those skills. Ambilichu et al. (2022) have argued that strategic leadership can be deployed in a manner that will condition organizational resources to serve the role of dynamic capabilities in line with the characteristics suggested by Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997).

Jamhour (2010) conducted an applied study of the paint industry in the United Arab Emirates to investigate how a company's competitive edge in terms of its core competences affects its performance. This research showed the indirect effect of core competence on organizational performance via competitive advantage. Moga (2021) conducted a study on the impact of core competences on the operation of service-oriented businesses, using the example of Micro Cap Holdings. This research set out to answer the question of whether or not the implementation of core competencies would improve the performance of the service sector, with a focus on Micro Cap Holdings. It was found that there was a positive and significant relationship between an organization's effectiveness and its level of marketing, HR, R&D, and financial resource competence. The results showed that the independent factors were responsible for 72.7% of the variation in the dependent study variable. Ambilichu et al. (2022) in their study on 315 SMEs based in the UK reported positive relationships between strategic leadership attributes addressing competences with performance of the SMEs. The authors relied on the logic of the findings of the reviewed studies to propose the possible effect of building core competences as a dimension of strategic leadership on performance. Thus, hypothesis 3 of the study is stated:

H3: Deployment of components of building core competences as an element of strategic leadership among the flower farms by the managers will have a significant positive statistical effect on performance of the flower farms.

Leadership Networking and Performance

Leadership networking is the capacity of a leader to influence others informally as opposed to using their formal authority. A strong leadership network facilitates access to individuals, information, and resources. Hitt and Duane (2002) suggest that a strategic leader can leverage his or her network to solve challenges and generate opportunities within an organization. Leaders with robust networks prioritize operational and personal networks, the fundamental forms of networking. This allows leaders to fulfill current tasks more effectively and efficiently, while also allowing them to grow professionally. According to Cepiku and Mastrodascio (2021), a network is the connective tissue that binds organizations and individuals together. Networking binds employees and organizations to common objectives and structures of interdependence. In leadership, network is more about establishing mutual trust and understanding, as well as negotiating shared goals. Leadership networking is collaborative, decentralized, facilitative, emergent, and bottom-up. Leaders build personal connections and networks with the top executives of other companies, who may be suppliers, clients, or competitors. Leadership networking increases organizational performance by providing public value by harmonizing processes, structures, outcomes, and accountabilities (Bolden et al., 2020).

To further the goals of their organizations, leaders engage in leadership networking, which is defined by Grayson and Baldwin (2007) as "the process by which leaders create and use their networks to forge alliances and enhance relationships". The ability of a leader to influence others informally as opposed to using their hierarchical power is known as leadership networking. Access to people, knowledge, and resources is made easier with the aid of a strong leadership network. A strategic leader can use their network to address issues and seize opportunities inside a business. Strong networkers concentrate their attention on operational and personal networks, the fundamental types of networking. This enables leaders to carry out current jobs more successfully and effectively while advancing their leadership careers.

According to Cepiku and Mastrodascio (2021), a network is the connecting tissue that holds cooperative groups of people and organizations together. Through networks, businesses and their employees work together to achieve common goals and operate under interdependent frameworks. Building a network in leadership is more about fostering understanding and mutual trust than it is about negotiating shared goals (Stiver, 2017). Collective, dispersed, bottom-up, facilitative, emergent characteristics characterize leadership networking. Direct cohesive links of personal relationships and exchanges between leaders of organizations and external entities produce leadership networking in an organizational setting (Acquaah, 2006). Higher levels of intimacy, reciprocal services, and emotional intensity define leadership networking. The senior management of other firms, who may be suppliers, clients, or rivals of the organization, are connected to by leaders through personal networking. By coordinating processes, structures, outputs, and accountabilities, leadership networking enhances organizational performance (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). The research by Ma and Seidl (2017) identified the role of networking both at micro and macro levels of organizational analysis. In view of other empirical evidence showing positive effect of the characteristics of strategic leadership on performance, it would be logical to note that networking will have a positive effect on performance (Kurzhals et al. 2020; Cortes & Herrmann, 2021). The authors relied on this logic of the conceptual and theoretical connection between networking and organizational outcomes as well as the empirical evidence.
as the basis for proposing the effect of leadership networking on performance of the flower farms. Hypothesis 4 of the study therefore is stated as:

**H4:** Deployment of components of Leadership Networking as an element of strategic leadership among the flower farms by the managers will have a positive significant statistical effect on performance of the flower farms.

### Research and Methodology

#### Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. By using a descriptive survey design, a researcher can gather information to aid in decision-making and, ultimately, help in informing decisions for enhancing corporate growth. Descriptive survey design is a method used in quantitative research in which a researcher polls a representative sample of the population or the entire population to collect information about their attitudes and personal traits. This process requires the use of questionnaires to obtain quantitative and numeric data (Morgan, 2014). The data are then methodically evaluated to describe trends in response patterns and to test research questions or hypotheses. It has been demonstrated that descriptive survey designs are one of the most successful approaches for doing research. In order to arrive at a reliable and impartial conclusion, researchers often resort to conducting surveys in order to gather data from a sizable sample of respondents. As noted by Orodho (2012), survey research enables researchers to not only provide but also analyze data collected regarding a certain occurrence for the purpose of elucidation. As a quantitative research approach, survey is regarded as a viable form of inquiry in the fields of both study and evaluation (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). Using a descriptive survey methodology, the researchers were able to collect data from multiple flower companies.

#### Research Population

The study was done in the horticulture industry in Kenya. The horticulture industry comprises organizations involved in fruit and flower farming. The population of the study was drawn from firms in the flower farming business located in Nakuru county. According to the Nakuru County Department of Agriculture, there are 43 flower farms in operation in the County. The study was done as a census of the 43 farms. The respondents for the study were the Chief Executive officers, deputy chief executives and heads of functional areas. The study targeted one respondent per flower farm.

#### Research Data and Instrumentation

The study relied on primary data obtained from the respondents to answer the hypotheses of the study. A structured 5-point likert scale questionnaire was constructed using indicators of the study constructs as operationalised from the reviewed literature. The scale for the independent variables required respondents to indicate the extent that the managers in the flower farms deployed the indicators of the dimensions of strategic leadership with the lowest level of 1 being none at all to the highest level of 5 being very high extent. Each of the independent variables was operationalised using 8 indicators that were included in the research instrument. The dependent variable was operationalised using relevant metrics for both financial and non-financial performance and five indicators were adopted in the final questionnaire. The scale for the dependent variable required the respondents to indicate the percentage level of growth experienced in each of the metrics with the lowest being 1-5% and the highest being over 20%. The researchers based this classification on the general industry growth trends that have been reported by leaders in the industry part of which has been applied in previous research with satisfactory results (Kitenga, 2020; Kitenga, Kilika & Muchemi 2020a; Kitenga, Kilika & Muchemi 2020b). The research questionnaire was piloted to determine its validity with a similar set of respondents drawn from flower farms in the neighboring county to Nakuru of Kiambu. There were no major issues raised by the sampled pilot survey respondents and the reliability of the instrument for the pilot study for all the variables was above the acceptable threshold of α=0.7. The reliability of the main survey as reported in Table 1 indicated that the overall reliability of the instrument was 0.867 and those for the individual variables were above 0.86. The administration of the instrument was done via a variety of methods. First, telephone calls were made to each of the farms to seek permission and secure appointment with the relevant officers. The researchers then visited the flower farms with the help of a research assistant to help the respondents understand the purpose of the research, the research instrument and the kind of data required. This allowed the respondents time to peruse through the necessary supporting information in their records suitable to generate responses especially on the dependent variable. Upon full explanation, the respondents were then given a week within which to fill and the questionnaire collected at an agreed date later. Over all this enhanced interest and cooperation such that the response rate attained a 100% level.

### Findings And Discussions

#### Findings

**Respondents’ characteristics**

The study targeted the Chief executive officers, Deputy CEOs and heads of sections drawn from each of the 43 flower firms operating in Nakuru county. The study recorded a 100% response rate. The demographic data on the respondents indicated that 14% comprised CEOs, 65% deputy CEOs and 21% functional heads. In terms of gender, there were more male respondents (88%) compared to...
female (12%). Those with work experience of between 2-5 years were the majority (72%) followed by those with 5-10 years (21%). Majority of the respondents had an undergraduate degree (67%), postgraduate (12%) and diploma (22%).

Descriptive Statistics and variable correlations

The behaviour of the study variables among the flower firms was summarized using descriptive statistics of the mean and the standard deviation. The primary data obtained using a 5-point likert scale was used to compute the mean and standard deviation for each of the study variables and Pearson correlation coefficient calculated to show how the variables correlate among themselves and with the dependent variable. The descriptive statistics indicate that the dimensions of strategic leadership were embraced and practiced by the respondents in the flower firms to varying levels of extent. Establishing purpose and leadership networking were deployed to a low extent while building organization culture and core competences were deployed to a moderate extent. The level of performance reported by the flower farms was rated by the respondents at the level of growth between 15-20%. The correlation coefficients indicate that the variables had significantly strong correlations with the dependent variable.

Table 1: Variable Characteristics and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>α Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Direction</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td><strong>1.000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Culture</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.812**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Core Competences</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.810**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Networking</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.716**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.812**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.05

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Test of Hypotheses

The study tested four hypotheses using each of the independent variables against the dependent variable. The multiple regression output is shown in Table 2. The regression results indicate a strong relationship between performance of the flower farms and the four dimensions of strategic leadership (Adj. R²=0.807). The regression model fit is good with F=42.72; P=0.000.

Table 2: Results of Hypotheses Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>.909</td>
<td></td>
<td>Effect of Strategic Leadership strong on Performance. 80.7 % variation in performance explained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>42.72</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Model fit good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSE</td>
<td>35.893</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSE</td>
<td>7.412</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Constant</td>
<td>.561</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>H 1 Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Direction</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>H 1 Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Culture</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>H 2 Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Core Competence</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>H 3 Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β Leadership Networking</td>
<td>.504</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>H 4 Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis of the study determined the effect of setting organization direction/purpose on performance of flower farms. The regression results presented in Table 2 show that there is a significant positive statistical effect of setting organizational direct/purpose on performance (β =0.504, p = 0.000<0.05). Hypothesis one of the study is supported. The independent variable was conceptualized from the perspective embraced in strategic management that considers the purpose in terms of the reason for existence of organizations (Pearce et.al, 2012). Conceptualized in this manner, purpose becomes a driving factor that helps in creating a work environment in which both leaders and the workforce obtain the motivation to contribute towards achievement of organizational goals. Thus the purpose was measured through the indicators of shared vision, direction towards organization mission, beliefs and
Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis of the study tested the effect of organization culture on performance of the sampled flower farms. The study established a positive significant effect of organization culture on performance ($\beta = 0.247, p = 0.027 < 0.05$). This significant positive effect supports hypothesis 2 of the study. The researchers offered explanation on this finding based on the conceptualization of the independent variable in the hypothesis and in comparison, with previous researches. The construct of organization culture was conceptualized as adopted in organizational studies that has considered its nature and role from the lens of shared beliefs and norms that condition behavior of the workforce. In this sense, culture as a component of strategic leadership will manifest in a way that regulates the behavior of both leaders and their followers by creating a work environment suitable to motivate workers to produce the required behaviors for accomplishing the strategic intents of organizations. The specific indicators that were used include promoting innovation, open door policies, staff development programs, job security, encouraging risk taking and mentorship. These attributes of culture were found to be practiced at the level of moderate extent. The conceptual and theoretical literature had argued that when these attributes are embedded in the work practices of leaders, the emergent work environment would result in healthy leader-follower relationships that would contribute positively to success of an organization. The finding on the hypothesis thus is comparable with previous research findings by Nthini (2013), Ahmed and Shafiq (2018), and Joseph and Kibera (2019) who found a positive relationship between diverse attributes of culture and performance. The attributes of culture used to relate to performance in these previous researches were effective culture, company culture and productivity and corporate culture. These are also in support of other previous researches by Ma and Seidl (2017) and Kurzhals et al. (2020). However, these previous researches used a narrow conceptualization of the construct as a component of strategic leadership. The current study expanded the scope of the conceptualization to include aspects of culture that are more inclined to strategic thinking touching on innovation and creation of supportive work environment that is aligned to support the required level of strategic thinking that the strategic leadership embraces.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 of the paper tested the effect of building core competences on performance of flower farms. The findings show a significant positive effect of building core competence on performance ($\beta = 0.457, p = 0.002 < 0.05$). The findings support hypothesis 3 of the study. The variable was conceptualized in the study as the manner in which the leader would ensure deployment of resources to build human resources and capabilities that will make the organization to be outstanding. To ensure the firm outperforms its rivals, the strategic leader will have to invest in developing human resources and social capital as key drivers of firm competitiveness. Due to the changing nature of the environment of operation, the leader will be required to deploy the resources in a manner that conditions the resources as dynamic capabilities that will enhance the organizations fitness in its turbulent environment. The descriptive statistics reported that the dimensions of core competence measured were embraced by the sampled leaders to a moderate extent. The relative contribution of this level leading to the support of the hypothesis is consistent with those of previous researches. Jamhour (2010) reported a positive relationship between core competence and performance; Shafie et al. (2015) had a similar finding in relating leadership competence with performance, Ambilichu et al. (2022) reported the same kind of finding in relating core skills with performance while Moga (2021) found a positive effect of core competence on performance.

Hypothesis 4

The last hypothesis of the study tested the effect of leadership networking on performance. The regression results show a significant positive effect of leadership networking on performance ($\beta = 0.597, p = 0.000 < 0.05$) thus supporting hypothesis 4 of the study. Leadership Networking in this study was conceptualized for the micro and macro levels to appropriately assess the relative contribution of strategic leadership not only at an organizational level but also across organizations. In this respect the concern from strategic management is how the leader deploys leadership skills and abilities to build relationships and develop alliances within and without an organization. An important aspect of the networking is the use of informal form of influence to create collaborations among workers and by organizations. The study employed indicators of communication, stakeholder engagement, intraorganizational collaboration, professional networking and facilitation for networking. The study reported that these aspects of networking were deployed by the sampled managers to a low extent. Inspite of this low extent, its effect on performance is significant and positive. The support of the hypothesis concurs with the logic of the conceptualization by Cepiku and Mastrodascio (2021) and Stiver (2017). Cepiku and Mastrodascio (2021) offered an insight on how networking would contribute to performance using team working and group cooperation by which organizations harness the efforts of their employees to achieve goals. Stiver (2017) further explained that building a network in leadership is more about fostering understanding as the strategic leadership ensures collective, dispersed, bottom-up, facilitative, emergent characteristics characterize leadership networking. The finding also supports previous empirical findings by Ma and Seidl(2017), Kurzhals et al. (2022) and Cortes and Hermann(2021).
Discussions

The study was designed to address two questions. The first question was on the dimensions of strategic leadership that have been deployed by managers in the horticulture industry. The descriptive statistics reported in this study confirmed that four dimensions of strategic leadership have been deployed. The areas deployed are those that have focused on setting direction/purpose for the future of the flower farms, establishing organization cultures, building core competences and leadership networking. The manner in which the dimensions have been deployed falls into two categories, low and moderate extent. Those that were moderately deployed are building organizational culture and core competences while those at a low extent were setting direction and leadership networking. The dimensions deployed at low extent raise a concern due to the role they play in enshrining strategic thinking and realizing the goals of the strategic thinking. The theory underpinning the independent construct of the study had argued for the deployment of strategic leadership on the premise of the need to engrish strategic thinking in organizations as they seek to respond and adapt to their changing external contexts. The fact that these have been deployed to a low extent could lead to important concerns on the capacity of the flower farms’ management to embed strategic thinking in their management style given that another important aspect of strategic thinking critical to strategic response, survival and fitness touching on networking is also deployed to a low extent. Perhaps the cognitive capacity of the sampled managers is relatively low given the demographic characteristics showing that majority of the respondents were deputy CEOs and working experience for most was between 2-5 years. In terms of the cognition and upper echelon approach, tenure, age, education and experience are considered important demographic attributes explaining top echelon contribution to organizational success. However, despite of this low extent, it is surprising that the dimensions offer a strong effect given their respective beta coefficients of 0.504 and 0.597 respectively.

In terms of the conceptual role of strategic leadership, the literature is of the view that strategic leadership would inject some form of dynamic capability to the organization that would enable the firm to predict the future, prepare for it, adapt and respond to the level of environmental turbulence (Ambilichu et al., 2022). To the extent that the low and moderate levels of the deployment of the dimensions of strategic leadership have made a significant positive effect on performance could be argued that they have helped the flower farms to generate a form of dynamic capability that has contributed to the ability of the flower farms to attain a growth rate in performance level of between 15-20%. How this capability may have resulted could be discerned from the nature of the dimensions of strategic leadership deployed. The focus of the first dimension of setting direction helps in defining the future by setting purpose, vision, long term objectives and core values that have been presented in the literature as critical components of the foundational practices for the journey organizations have to walk in their strategic management process. The other dimensions involved in this process touch on what organizations find it necessary to do to realize the desired direction, thus building organizational systems that are supported by work environments, human resource capabilities and networking at intra and inter-organizational levels.

The second question the paper addressed was on how the flower farms have benefitted from the deployment of strategic leadership. Towards this, the study proposed and tested four hypotheses based on each of the four dimensions of strategic leadership deployed. The hypotheses focused on the effect of each of the dimensions on performance of the flower farms. Each of the hypotheses was supported indicating that the dimensions of strategic leadership have a significant positive statistical effect on performance of the flower farms. Overall, the variation in performance of the flower farms that is explained by the four dimensions is relatively high (Adj. R²=0.807). This implies that the deployment of strategic leadership by the flower farms has made a significant contribution to their performance. The justification for undertaking the research in this sector was based on its significance to the economy and the nature of the environment the sector faces that requires the deployment of strategic leadership dimensions in a way that enshrines strategic thinking. Thus, the contribution of the dimensions of strategic leadership can be argued to derive from those aspects of strategic leadership that ensure strategic thinking is inherent in the organizations management practices. The strategic thinking would ensure organizations understand and respond to their environments through strategic planning and implementation of relevant strategic choices which is at the center of the focus of strategic leadership. Thus the concern raised as to what dimensions of strategic leadership have been deployed by managers in flower farms has been partly answered as well as the manner in which the flower farms have benefited.

Conclusions

In view of the concerns and findings of the study reported in this paper, the authors make several conclusions and suggestions for further research. With regard to the concern on the dimensions of strategic leadership deployed by the flower farms, the study concludes that four dimensions of strategic leadership have been deployed to varying extents ranging from low to moderate extent. Those deployed to a low extent address aspects of strategic management touching on setting direction for the future and networking at intra and inter organizational level while those deployed at moderate extent address the manner the flower farms have build systems to create conducive work environment and the required human resource capability for attaining competitiveness. Secondly, the paper concludes that deployment of strategic leadership in the flower farms has made a significant contribution towards the ability of the farms to attain a satisfactory level of performance. The level of the deployment of the dimensions of strategic leadership has contributed to a relatively high proportion of the level of growth attained by the farms. Thus, the dimensions of strategic leadership are relevant for deployment in organizations operating in complex and turbulent environments that require the input of strategic thinking. The generalization of the conclusions however is limited by a number of factors. In terms of the context of the study, the
paper sampled 43 farms from the flower category. The findings would probably be much richer if the sample included all flower farms in the country as well as other organizations in the horticulture industry that were not included in the study. Secondly, the conceptualization of the constructs investigated was limited to the perspective of one theory that led to adoption of only four dimensions. The authors find a limitation in this in that there are other relevant theories suitable to inform choice of dimensions such as the upper echelon, managerial cognition and the resource based view. The study suggests that, for a more generalizable set of findings, future research needs to consider investigating the behavior of the dimensions of strategic leadership using a larger and more diversified sample of organizations in the horticulture industry. In the same breadth, since the study adopted only a few dimensions of strategic leadership, future research could consider more dimensions drawing input from a multidisciplinary theoretical framework informed by the upper echelon, cognitions and RBV theories.

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**References**


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