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ABSTRACT

This study determined the effect of strategic leadership on performance of safety management system in aviation industry in Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The study used primary data collected from the aviation service providers using structured questionnaires. It also utilized secondary data collected from publications of aviation authorities as well as from the respective services providers' journals and websites. The study involved a census of the managers in all the aviation service providers registered in Kenya. One hundred and thirty-two questionnaires were distributed corresponding to the total number of organizations registered as aviation service providers under the Kenya Civil Aviation (Safety Management) Regulations, 2018. Prior to the actual study, a pilot study was conducted using twenty (20) questionnaires and the results used to edit and modify the questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential statistical approaches were used to analyse the data collected from the respondents during the actual study. To accomplish this, the data was coded, assigned labels to variables categories and entered into the computer. Qualitative responses were analyzed using content analysis. The descriptive technique involved generation of frequencies, mean and percentages while inferential analysis technique involved establishing significant linear association amid the predictor variable and response variables. Pearson's correlation analysis and regression analysis was performed under the inferential analysis. The analysis of variance F-statistic was used to test the research hypothesis. The data was presented using tables, graphs, and charts. In Kenya's aviation business, strategic leadership has a positive significant link with the performance of the SMS. The report proposes that firms employ strategic leadership in order to achieve critical strategic ventures.

Keyword: *Performance of Safety Management System, Strategic Leadership*

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic firm level dimensions are precise functions of a certain business and are critical for any organizational activity or productivity. The confluence of multiple strategic firm level aspects improves an organization's success. Structures, systems, and procedures, style, workers, resources, shared values, strategy, and strategic outcomes are the aspects identified by Aldag and Kuzuhara (2018). Strategic firm level dimensions are usually associated to firm performance and these include strategic leadership (Vafeas, 2019). There are two diverse views on what really influences performance. The first viewpoint is that it is actually strategic firm level dimensions that highly influence performance (Galbreath & Galvins, 2018) whereas the second point view is that industry characteristics are the ones influencing organization performance. Performance in a firm reflects the implementation of strategies that give competitive advantage over other firms. Decision making process of a firm relies heavily on its performances that determine the direction the firm can take in the future. Decisions may therefore be based on strategic firm level dimension such as strategic leadership (Dabke, 2016).

According to Benn, Edwards, and Williams (2019), top management should be educated to execute outstanding leadership techniques in today's highly competitive corporate climate, where the value and relevance of intellectual assets is critical. Leadership, more so strategic leadership, is often regarded as one of the most essential aspects impacting an organization's efficiency through strategic decisions, firm structure, and process management. The direct activities, decisions, and actions of strategic leadership in a company are visible (Yukl, 2018). However, as previously stated, the lack of strategic leadership among senior executives in all firms is a significant impediment to corporate success. Doan (2020) in his study has identified strategic decision making on finances allocation as influencing the performance of organisations. Kenya being a member state of ICAO community is mandated to comply with the SMS implementation and operations (ICAO, 2019). Strategies employed by the organizations implementing and operating a new system will determine its performance.

In New Zealand, Safarova (2020) studied on the elements that determine firm performance of New Zealand listed companies. Their results found that eight key factors were found to have the most impact on the operating performance of the companies in other markets. These factors are; intangibles resource, cultures, leadership, cash on hand, leverage, firm specific risk, growth and tangibility. The results have supported previous studies' findings to some extent, with resource and culture being the most important factor determining firm performance, followed by leadership with the weaker relationships. Other factors appeared to be marginally related to the operating performance at different significance levels.

As part of its mandate, KCAA certifies aircraft operators (e.g., commercial airlines like Air Kenya), aviation-training organizations (e.g., East African School of Aviation), aviation maintenance organizations (e.g., phoenix aviation) and airport operators like Kenya Airports Authority (KAA) which have to meet the requirements of the individual respective regulations. Among certified operators of aircraft in Kenya is the national carrier- Kenya Airways, incorporated in 1977 and has its head office in Nairobi. It is currently operating as public-private partnership venture with the Government of Kenya being the majority shareholder (29.8. %), followed by KLM which has a 26.73% stake in the company (Iteba & Wekesa, 2018). These organizations within the aviation industry are formally known as aviation service providers.

Despite the development of safety management systems in the aviation industry, aircraft accidents and incidents have persisted internationally, regionally, and particularly in Kenya. According to the European Union Aviation Safety Agency's Annual Safety Review (2020), the number of non-

fatal accidents and serious incidents in 2019 increased when compared to the 10-year average. The annual accident numbers climbed in 2019, according to the ICAO safety report (2019), with a 16 percent increase in the overall number of accidents (ICAO 2019). This is worrying not only for the safety of passengers but also for Kenya's economy and her bid to strengthen the grasp of the regional aviation hub in Nairobi. It is evident from the above reports that the SMS performance has not yielded enough positive results as aviation accidents and incidents are regularly occurring and audit gaps persist in subsequent inspections. Appropriate implementation of SMS was envisaged to see a reduction of these numbers (ICAO, 2019).

Successful managers understand the need for a sound business strategy and thus invest significant time, effort, and money in strategy development. Nevertheless, the real value of strategy can only be recognized through implementation; the ability to implement strategy is more important than the quality of the strategy itself (Martin, 2010). Holbeche (2015) avows that organizations find themselves in an execution trap i.e., the inability to execute a well-designed strategy. All organizations are therefore prompted to adopt Strategic firm level dimensions to ensure their survival and development of a competitive edge over their competitors. Effective implementation of safety management system ensures hazard identification and resolution as well as promoting continuous safety monitoring (Airport Council International, 2016).

Crichton et al. (2018) concentrated on the role of non-technical expertise and its effects on the performance of safety elements in aviation industry. In Kenya several studies have been undertaken in the aviation industry. Odhiambo and Kaibui (2016) revealed that stakeholder's involvement affected implementation of air safety projects at KCAA. Nyaga (2010) undertook a study on successful implementation of safety management system programs focusing on Kenya Civil Aviation Authority but left out other agencies as set by ICAO (2019).

Due to contextual and managerial differences among organizations, issues gained from these previous studies may not be assumed to explain strategic leadership at the aviation industry in Kenya. The studies do not also sufficiently address the subject of SMS performance as a strategy to minimize safety concerns in the industry. It leaves a gap that this researcher sought to fill by focusing on the effect of strategic leadership on performance of safety management system in aviation industry in Kenya.

The objective of the study was to determine the effect of strategic leadership on performance of safety management system in aviation industry in Kenya.

This study tested for the following research hypothesis:

H_{01}: Strategic leadership has no significant relationship with the performance of safety management system in aviation industry in Kenya.

The Upper Echelons Theory guided the study. Upper Echelons Theory is the theory that top executives view their problems through their own highly individualized glasses, as stated explicitly by Hambrick and Mason (1984). The theory states that top management team (TMT) members' characteristics, including past experiences, values, and personalities, affect how they make strategic and organizational decisions (Yamak, Nielsen & Escriba-Esteve, 2014). This individualized construal of strategic situations arises because of differences among executives in their experiences, values, personalities and other human factors. The link between managers, organizational processes, and outcomes is the focus of the Upper Echelons Theory (UET). In this study, the UET Theory was utilized to explain the relationship between strategic leadership and performance, with the goal of determining the impact of strategic leadership on the performance of the safety management system in the Kenyan aviation industry.

According to Imenda (2014), a conceptual framework is a result of bringing together a number of related concepts to explain a given event and gives a wider understanding of the research problem. The variables utilized in the literature review are summarized in the conceptual framework employed. The study's conceptual framework is represented in Figure 1.

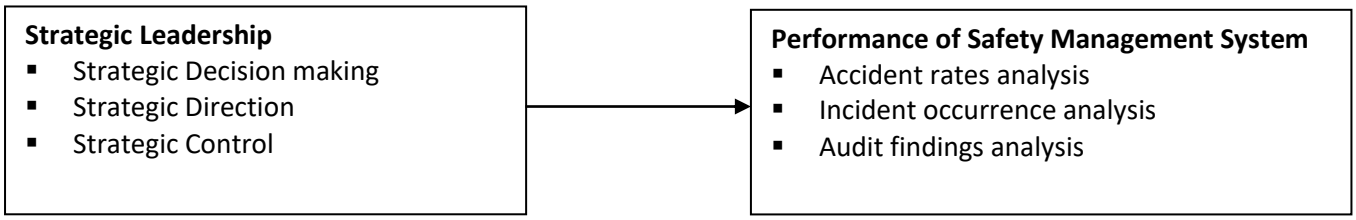

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

A research philosophy is the belief about the way in which data, an occurrence or phenomenon should be collected, analysed and consumed by users (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2014). In this study, a positivistic approach was used and is concerned with testing hypotheses, structured research design and objective method using cross-sectional design. These methods for scientific way of logical reasoning are both deductive and inductive methods. Deduction begins with an expected pattern that is tested against observations, whereas induction begins with observations and seeks to find a pattern within them (Babbie, 2010). Masedeh (2012) argued that positivism defines knowledge in terms of empirically verifiable observation.

This study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. This design allows the researcher to collect a wide range of information without interfering with the environment since nothing is manipulated. This, therefore, enables a researcher to obtain large amounts of data from a sizeable population in a highly effective, easy and in an economical way using questionnaires.

The population for this study comprised of all the aviation service providers in Kenya that have been mandated by ICAO to implement safety management system in their organisations as described at the scope section of this proposal. ICAO categorizes the aviation industry into aviation service providers. In Kenya, the service providers are as follows: Air Traffic Services, Approved Maintenance Organizations, Approved Training Organizations, International Aircraft Operators (usually referred to as international airlines), and Operators of Certified Aerodromes. ICAO has prescribed designated heads of safety as the responsible persons in charge of implementation of safety management system in these organisations. The target population for the study was the managers of these aviation service providers in Kenya.

Table 1: Aviation Service Providers in Kenya

SN	Organization	Number Operating in Kenya
1	ATS Providers (KCAA Manned Airports)	9
2	Approved Training Organizations	19
3	Certified Operators of Aerodrome	12
4	Approved Maintenance Organizations	50
5	International Commercial Aircraft Operators	42

Source: KCAA, 2019

The sampling frame for this study was the managers in the aviation service providers detailed in Table 1. To come up with an appropriate study sample, the study utilized stratified sampling technique and more specifically proportionate stratified random sampling. The population was grouped into five strata representing each category of the services provider. A census of all managers in the five categories of service providers was carried out. Table 2 shows the sampling technique and sample size.

Table 2: Sampling Technique and Sample Size

SN	Organization	Number Operating in Kenya	Respondents (Heads of Safety)
1	ATS Providers	9	9
2	Approved Training Organizations	19	19
3	Certified Operators of Aerodrome	12	12
4	Approved Maintenance Organizations	50	50
5	International Aircraft Operators	42	42
	Total	**132**	**132**

Primary data was collected using questionnaire whereas information in journals and periodicals was collected from libraries as secondary data. The researcher used questionnaires with both close-ended and open-ended questions where the respondents were required to explain briefly. Secondary data was used to assess the performance of SMS in the organizations.

Questionnaires were self-administered to the 132 respondents. To ensure maximum response, the organizations were first contacted and adequately informed about the intended data collection exercise. The questionnaires were then emailed to the respondents. Secondary data was obtained from the KCAA library, ICAO records and respective organization journals, websites, periodicals among other reliable sources. The study carried out a pilot test to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaires.

The study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentages was used in analysing quantitative data (Kothari & Garg, 2014). On the other hand, qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. The data was presented using frequency, tables and bar graphs. To enhance data handling, Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 25 was used due to its ability to handle both small and voluminous data (Dempsey, 2013). Inferential statistics were also carried out to establish the nature of the relationship that exists between variables.

A linear regression model was used in the analysis to determine the association amid the independent variables and the performance of SMS in aviation industry in Kenya.

$$\mathbf{Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon} \quad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \quad 1$$

Where Y is Performance of SMS, $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ is the Y intercepts, β_1 is Coefficients of Regression and ε is the error term of the model.

X_1 = Strategic Leadership

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study selected a sample of 132 heads of safety from aviation service providers in Kenya. All selected respondents were issued with questionnaires for data collection, but the researcher was able to receive back only 123 questionnaires. The returned questionnaires formed a response rate of 93.2%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2012), a response rate of 50% and above is good for analysis and reporting, that of 60% is sufficient while 70% and above is excellent. Therefore, since our response rate was above 70% it was considered to be excellent and was used for further analysis and reporting.

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents gave their responses on statements relating with strategic leadership. The results obtained were as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Strategic Leadership

Statement	Mean	Std. dev.
Our organization encourages employees to make decisions with minimal formal monitoring	4.016	1.259
Our organization has a clearly defined decision-making policy	3.967	1.474
Our top management makes timely decisions	3.959	1.667
Our organization clearly defines its mission to achieve high performance of SMS	3.837	1.446
Our top management is committed to build trusting relationship to move employees to a desired direction	3.797	1.128
Our top management has developed a series of actions to manage risks and safety management issues	4.008	0.945
Our top management tracks all safety management system strategies to their implementation	3.919	1.050
Our top management adjusts and improves SMS strategies where necessary.	3.805	1.159

Results in Table 3 show that all statements had standard deviations less than two, which is a low standard deviation suggesting that the respondents had agreeing opinions with the mean. The results specifically show that the respondents agreed that their organization encourages employees to make decisions with minimal formal monitoring (M=4.016, SD=1.259), the organization has developed a series of actions to manage risks and safety management issues (M=4.008, SD=0.945); their organization has a clearly defined decision-making policy (M=3.967, SD=1.474); their top management makes timely decisions (M=3.959, SD=1.667); the management tracks all safety management system strategies to their implementation responsibility (M=3.919, SD=1.050); their organization clearly defines its mission to achieve high performance of SMS (M=3.837, SD=1.446); their management adjusts and improves SMS strategies where necessary (M=3.805, SD=1.159); and their top management is committed to build trusting relationship to move employees to a desired direction (M=3.797, SD=1.128). The findings concur with those of Serfontein (2010) who indicated that strategic leadership had a positive and significant influence on organizational performance measured in terms of earnings per share (EPS) and return on assets (ROA).

Performance of SMS

Respondents gave the level to which they agreed or disagreed with various statements on performance of SMS. Table 4 presents the findings obtained.

Table 4: Performance of SMS

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
Firm culture influences the performance of SMS	2	6	10	85	21	3.961	1.149
Capacity building influences the performance of SMS	4	6	4	87	22	3.955	1.199
Firm resources influence the performance of SMS	4	6	2	97	14	3.902	1.345
Strategic leadership influences the performance of SMS	6	2	12	89	14	3.836	1.207
Stakeholders' collaboration has a moderating effect on the relationship between firm level aspects and performance of SMS	6	4	9	91	14	3.836	1.234

Results in Table 4 show that the standard deviation values for each of the statement are less than two; this suggests that respondent individual responses did not differ from the mean. The findings further show that the respondents agreed that organizational culture influences the performance of SMS (M=3.961, SD=1.149), capacity building influences the performance of SMS (M=3.955, SD=1.199), firm resources influence the performance of SMS (M=3.902, SD=1.345), strategic leadership influences the performance of SMS in the organization (M=3.836, SD=1.207) and stakeholders' collaboration has a moderating effect on the relationship between firm level dimensions and performance of SMS in the firm (M=3.836, SD=1.234). The study findings agree with Noble performance framework that identified that communication is important because the details of performance effort need communication as early and as clearly as possible, while incentives are important to inspire and motivate members to change in accordance with the new strategy. It also agrees with Lares-Mankki (2014) who studied on strategy implementation bottlenecks and revealed that, failure in implementation of strategic plans was due to poor and inadequate information sharing with uncertain responsibility and accountability.

Inferential Statistics

Relationship between study variables was determined by computing inferential statistics. The study computed correlation and regression analysis.

Correlation Analysis

To evaluate the association between the dependent and independent variables, the researchers used correlation analysis. Pearson R correlation was used to measure strength and the direction of linear relationship between variables. The association was considered to be small if ±0.1 <r< ±0.29; medium if ±0.3 <r< ±0.49; and strong if r> ±0.5.

Table 5: Correlations

		Performance of SMS	Strategic leadership
Performance of SMS	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	123	
Strategic leadership	Pearson Correlation	.710**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	123	123

The results show that strategic leadership and performance of SMS were significant (p-values<0.05). Further, strategic leadership has a strong positive and significant association with performance of SMS (r=0.710, p=0.000). This infers that strategic leadership had a significant influence on performance of SMS in Kenyan aviation industry.

Regression Analysis

The study did a regression analysis of strategic leadership and performance of SMS. Table 6 presents the findings obtained.

Table 6: Simple Regression for Strategic Leadership

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.710[a]	.504	.498	4.96355

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	316.861	1	316.861	12.861	.000[b]
	Residual	2981.057	121	24.637		
	Total	3297.919	122			

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.636	.439		3.727	.001
	Strategic leadership	.383	.107	.310	3.586	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Performance of SMS						

From the findings presented in Table 6, the value of adjusted R^2 was 0.498 which implies that 49.8% of variations in performance of SMS can be explained changes in strategic leadership. The remaining 50.2% infer that performance of SMS can be accredited to other elements other than changes in strategic leadership. Results also indicate that strategic leadership and performance of SMS are strongly and positively relates as illustrated by (R) value of 0.710.

From the Anova findings, the p-value obtained was 0.000 which is less than 0.05, an indication that the model was significant. The findings also show that the f-calculated value (12.861) is greater than the F-critical value ($F_{1,121}$=3.919). Since the f-calculated value is greater than the f-critical value it shows that the model is reliable and can be used to predict performance of SMS in aviation industry in Kenya.

From the coefficients table, the following model was fitted.

$$\mathbf{Y= 1.636 + 0.383\ X_1 + \varepsilon}$$

From the equation, holding strategic leadership at a constant zero, performance of SMS will be at a constant value of 1.636. The findings also show that a unit increase in strategic leadership will lead to 0.383 units increase in performance of safety management system. Results also indicate that the t-statistic (3.586) has a p-value (0.000) which is below the significance of (0.05). The null hypothesis is accepted and it is concluded that strategic leadership has significant association with the performance of SMS in aviation industry in Kenya. The finding agree with those of Serfontein (2010) that strategic leadership influenced organizational performance in terms of profits per share (EPS) and return on assets in a favourable and significant way (ROA).

CONCLUSION

The study established that strategic leadership had a significant association with performance of SMS. The association of strategic leadership and performance of SMS was also found to be positive. Therefore, enhancement in strategic leadership would result to enhance in performance of SMS. From the results, the study concluded that strategic leadership has a significant relationship with the performance of SMS in aviation industry in Kenya.

Strategic leadership had a positive significant association with performance of SMS in aviation industry in Kenya. The study proposes that firms employ strategic leadership in order to achieve critical strategic ventures. It was suggested that leaders should continually rethink organizational motives. The leader must concentrate on the organization's operational tasks while also keeping an eye on the developments that affect it both inside and externally. Such changes will very certainly decide the organization's future existence, and they will provide opportunities for the company to expand. This study proposes organisations to track changes in their strategies and also analyse associated risks in an effort to track, monitor and evaluate progress on performance.

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