



**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN KENYA**

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## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE OF TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

*Increased competition exerts pressure on firms to be proactive and to formulate successful strategies that facilitate proactive response to anticipated and actual changes in the environment through strategic leadership which has widely described as one of the key drivers of effective strategy implementation. The main objective the study was to investigate the influence of strategic leadership on performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. The specific objectives were to establish the influence of strategic direction setting, strategic thinking, strategic leadership intelligence and strategic articulation on performance of telecommunication firms. The study was anchored grounded on Ricky Griffins theory, goal setting theory, managerial leadership theory, and Upper Echelon theory. This study employed descriptive research design. The target population was of 37 telecommunication firms and the Slovincs formula was used to obtain a sample size of 108 respondents. The correlation results showed a strong, positive linear relationship between strategic direction setting, strategic articulation practice, strategic intelligence leadership, strategic thinking practice and performance of telecommunications firms. The regression results indicated that strategic direction setting practice, strategic articulation practice, strategic intelligence leadership practice and strategic thinking practice had significant and positive influence on organizational performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. The study concludes that strategic direction setting practice, strategic articulation practice, strategic intelligence leadership practice and strategic thinking practice positively and significantly affect the performance of telecommunication firms. The study recommended that the management of the company need to employ strategic direction setting practice, strategic articulation practice, strategic intelligence leadership practice and strategic thinking practice so as to increase of the performance of telecommunication firms.*

**Key words:** Articulation, Direction, Intelligence, Leadership, Performance, Practice, Setting, Strategic, Thinking.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of performance remains an important centre of attention in the world of strategic management for every firm and sector that is driven by a mission and vision. Without it, it is difficult to say why a firm exists. However, in order to achieve a better performance and have the firm continue realizing its mission in the turbulent business environment, every firm requires to deploy appropriate strategic leadership (Kinyanjui & Otieno, 2019). Without a doubt, organization performance and strategy are now more important than they were in the past (Miller & Cardinal, 2018). Competitive businesses' strategy decisions are being influenced, either directly or indirectly, by a number of factors, including globalization, technology, and turbulent business conditions (Kitonga, 2017).

Kinyanjui and Omutoko (2017) note that the performance of telecommunication sector does not only influence the economy but also drives other industries and thus contributes to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). According to Ole Kulet, Wanyoike and Koima (2019) access to telecommunications is limited to urban areas in Africa and does not match the new technological advancement and is still far from meeting the economic and social needs of the public. However, the performance challenges experienced in the sector are made even more complex by the conflicting regulatory policies and goals (Onguko, & Ragui, 2018). As a result, the sector is faced with huge disparities on pricing of products and services by the sector players in which Safaricom is seen to be charging very high prices on similar products and services provided by other players. It has been suggested that implementing strategic leadership practices is crucial for managing organizations in the twenty-first century. The concept has gained traction since most firms operate in situations that are uncertain. Firms may improve performance while competing in tumultuous and uncertain conditions by using effective strategic leadership strategies. According to a number of academics, strategic leadership practice is the capacity of a

leader to plan ahead, see the future, remain adaptable, think strategically, and collaborate with subordinates to implement changes that will ensure the organization's viability (Serfontein, 2017).

A crucial component of strategic leadership in an organization is strategic direction. Creating a long-term organizational vision is a necessary step in determining strategic direction (Mutia, 2015). Development of human capital is yet another essential component of strategic leadership. It is recognized that without luring and keeping exceptional workers with the right information, dispositions, and abilities, no business or organization can carry out its operations successfully. According to Toor and Ofori (2017), employee performance and corporate culture are mediated by ethical behaviors. According to Jooste and Fourie (2016), moral behavior has a major role in organizational performance and is responsible for the success of businesses.

Globally in United States, the country in 2021 boasted of 83 percent smartphone adoption rate according to GSMA report. In addition, the country subscriber penetration in 2021 was 85%. On revenue performance, Verizon in 2022 generated 137 billion U.S. dollars and AT&T generated just 121 billion. In the United Kingdom, the country had approximately 111.04 million connections under the country code (+44) in 2022. In addition, the UK telecoms industry generated revenue of 31.8 billion British pounds in 2022, a slight increase from 2021, with growth of around 8.5 percent forecast in 2023.

In the global south, China, the market is increased at a Compound Annual Growth Rate in excess of 2% in 2022. The combined business revenue of firms in this sector totaled approximately 199 billion U.S. dollars. Further, three major telecoms in China, China Telecom, China Unicorn and China Mobile, generated 219 billion yuan worth of revenue for broadband internet services. (Xinhua, 2024). In Canada, telecommunications industry recorded a 3.5% increase in total revenues in 2023 (Government of Canada, 2024). Total revenues in

2022 grew by 5.4% compared to their 2019 pre-COVID-19 level, while overall inflation in the Canadian economy was 12.6% over the same period.

In South Africa, Lear (2016) conducted a study in South Africa on the impact of strategic leadership on strategy execution and the study's conclusions indicated that the strategic leadership action thought to be most crucial to the successful execution of a strategy is deciding on the organization's strategic direction. Industry wise, South Africa telecoms sector lost 22% in the last 12 months. Also the earnings for telecoms declined 26% per year over the last three years. Meanwhile revenues for these companies have grown 3.8% per year. This means that although more sales are being generated, either the cost of doing business or the level of investment back into businesses has increased, which has decreased profits (Wallstreet ZA, 2024). Barend (2016) asserts that strategic leadership has a favorable impact on how well strategy is implemented in South African firms. Sethibe and Steyn (2017) believed that in order to improve organizational performance in South Africa, it is beneficial to employ both transformational and transactional strategic leadership approaches.

In Nigeria, according to Abasilim, Gberevbie, and Osibanjo (2019), strategic leadership style is widely regarded as a crucial element in fostering employee commitment and as the driving force behind achieving organizational objectives in Nigeria. The Telecommunication sector market share was approximately USD 9.09 billion in 2024. However, the market size was expected grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 4.6% for the next three years, that is, 2024 to 2027 (Ibrahim, Haruna & Omeje, 2024). The Morocco telecommunication sector market size was estimated to be \$3.5 billion in 2021 and was expected to grow at a CAGR of over 3% in 2025 and 2026. In Egypt, telecommunication sector grew by 17% during the second quarter of the fiscal year 2020/21, the highest among all sectors in the economy, proven

to be remarkably resilient in the face COVID-19 pandemic and the Delta variant (Emara & Katz, 2023). The Egypt telecom and pay-TV services market size was valued at \$5.6 billion in 2022 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of more than 2% during the forecast period, 2022-2027. Egypt Telecom Market revenue is expected to register a CAGR of 3.65% over the next five years.

In East Africa, Uganda telecommunication sector gross revenue stood at US\$ 1bn in 12 months by end December, 2020 and first time the telecom sector crossed US\$ 1 bn mark (UCC, 2021). The firms in Telecom recorded a 3.3% year on year growth between the period of Sept 2019 and Sept 2020 in the subscription level despite a 3 million decline in subscribers between March 2020 and June 2020 attributed to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Madina, 2021). In Tanzania telecommunication sector revenue hit US\$2.2 billion in 2023. Mobile money subscriptions in Tanzania reached 44.35 million subscribers last year. The total telecom service revenue in Tanzania reached USD 2.2 billion in 2023 (The Exchange report, 2024).

Locally, Kenya's telecom industry has to contend with a drastically shifting environment. With market shares of 75%, 12%, and 9%, respectively, Safaricom, Airtel, and Telkom Kenya (Orange) are currently the leading companies in Kenya's telecommunications sector. More than 17 million subscribers are active in this area. Kenya's industry is undergoing significant transformation. The sector has changed over the last ten years due to legislative changes and technology advancements (CAK, 2018). There are now four companies in the market in addition to numerous other providers of data solutions. As of June 30, 2018, the customer base had grown to over 40.2 million subscribers (CAK, 2018).

The telecom market has witnessed strong growth in recent years and is expected to attain stronger growth over the forecast period to 2025 (PwC, 2023). However, Kenya's telecom market continues to undergo considerable changes in the wake of increased competition, improved international

connectivity, and rapid developments in the mobile market. The total telecom service revenue in Kenya will increase at a CAGR of more than 2%, during 2023-2028 period, primarily driven by revenue growth in mobile data and fixed broadband segment. National Broadband Network with broadband targets to be achieved by 2030 in order to ensure 10 Mbps and 100 Mbps speeds for 100% and 80% of the population, respectively and Digital Initiatives aimed at deployment of fiber-optic network across underserved counties will be the market driver in the country. Kivuva (2022) avers that in order to stay relevant and competitive, mobile phone companies must now set themselves apart from competitors by offering high-quality, value-added services to consumers. This requires strategic leadership and is a result of these changes, rising customer awareness, and industry regulations.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Bossidy, Charan, and Burck (2016) aver that strategic leadership is widely acknowledged as one of the most important factors that contribute to the successful implementation of strategies. In fact, a lack of it among an organization's top leadership has been identified as one of the main obstacles to successful strategy implementation (Kaplan & Norton, 2015). For example, even though Telkom Kenya has an advantage over other telecommunications in terms of infrastructure, the company has performed poorly in comparison and its market share has stalled. This axiom is demonstrated by the company's peanut increase of 0.2 percentage points, which allowed it to conclude the quarter with 8.8 percent of the market in June 2018, as opposed to Airtel's 21.4 percent (Communication Authority of Kenya, 2018). However, according to filings made by its ultimate parent company, Bharti Airtel Limited, telecoms company Airtel Networks Kenya experienced a greater net loss of Sh1.7 billion in the year ending December 2021 due to increased expenditures. About 5% of Safaricom's sales come from Airtel, demonstrating the significant difference in revenue

between the industry leader and its two competitors in the telecommunications space (Kivuva, 2022).

The mobile phone companies in Kenya have implemented a number of competitive strategies, including cost leadership, differentiation, marketing strategies, diversification, expansion, technology, customer service, and corporate social responsibility, according to Kamande's (2017).

#### **Objectives of the Study**

To determine the influence of strategic leadership practices on organizational performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. The following specific objectives guided the study;

- To establish the influence of strategic direction setting practice on organizational performance of Telecommunication firms in Kenya.
- To determine the influence of strategic articulation practice on organizational performance of Telecommunication firms in Kenya.
- To assess the influence of strategic intelligence leadership practice on organizational performance of Telecommunication firms in Kenya.
- To examine the influence of strategic thinking practice influence on organizational performance of Telecommunication firms in Kenya.

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

##### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is premised on Ricky Griffins theory, managerial leadership theory, Upper Echelon theory and performance theory.

##### **Ricky Griffins Theory**

According to the belief, senior leaders' initiatives must be implemented successfully for a company to function well. Some of the key internal elements that affect how well an organization performs include its structure, technology in use, staff skills, information control systems, leadership styles of



management, and culture, among other things. The model states that the key to an organization's effective implementation of change in a tumultuous business environment is strategic leadership (Redman & Wilkinson, 2013). Furthermore, the primary elements influencing an organization's performance are its leadership style, which establishes a strategic vision or direction, effective communication, employee motivation, and the establishment of a team culture and values within the organization (Taiwo & Idunnu, 2014). Leaders set the direction and impact the output of the group. In essence, goals and objectives of the firm can only be achieved through dedicated team of employees who are influenced by strong leadership (Arthur, Strickland & Gamble, 2014).

#### **Managerial Leadership Theory**

This theory believes that training programs may be created to modify the leadership styles of change managers and individuals can be made into leaders. This demonstrates that one might learn the greatest leadership philosophies (Northouse, 2013). The theory's foundation is the behavioral aspects of a leader's concern for people, or how much a leader takes into account the needs, interests, and development of team members when determining how to complete a task and how to maximize productivity, organizational efficiency, and output (Bhatia, 2014). This hypothesis is significant because it validates strategic leaders as the source of follower and subordinate happiness. According to Polston-Murdoch (2013), leadership influences how dedicated staff members are to furthering the company's aims and objectives. The approach provides a way to teach and grow leaders so they may alter their behavior in order to help subordinates achieve corporate goals, demystifying the idea that leaders are created, not born. Through the strategic articulation, employees' support may be harnessed, perhaps improving performance.

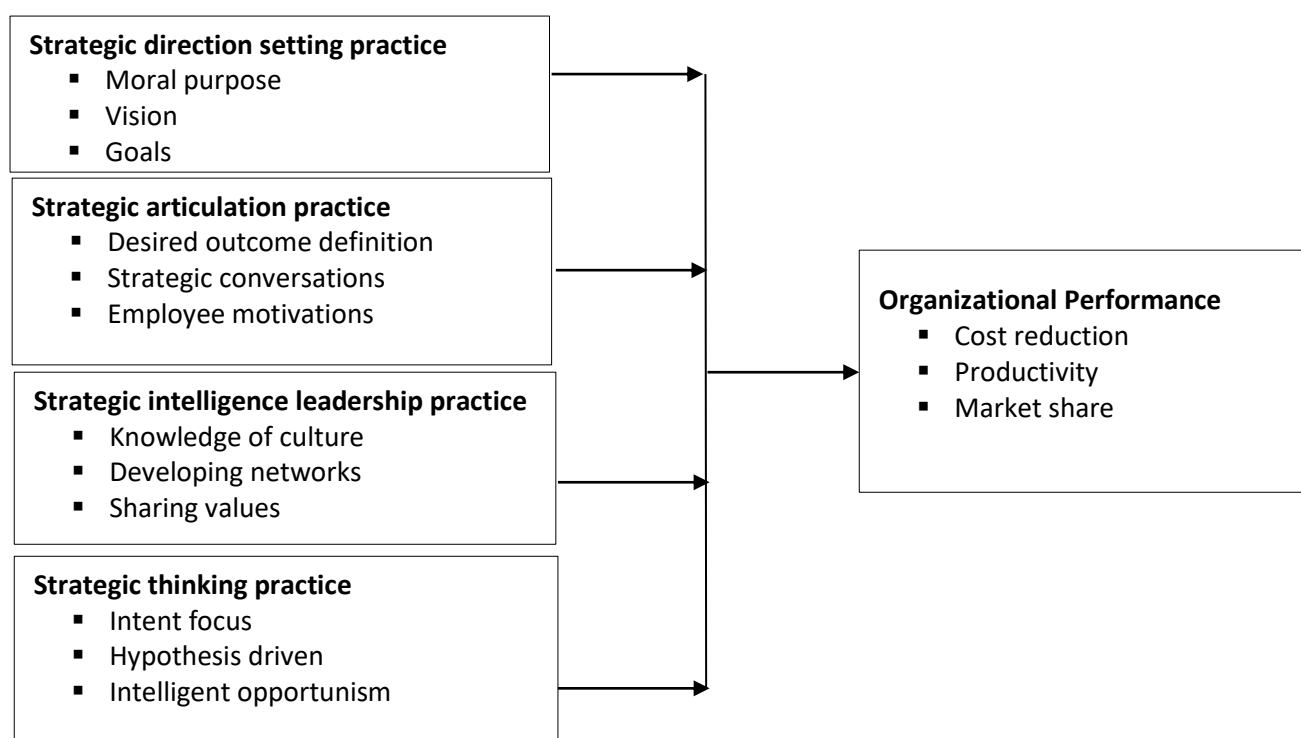
#### **Upper Echelon Leadership Theory**

The link between managers, organizational procedures, and results is the focus of this theory as it believes that a renewed focus on the authority and sway held by the most senior executives, including chief financial officers (CFO) and executives (CEO). The theory predicated on the idea that important senior individuals inside an organization have an impact on the company's results based on their knowledge, skill, and experience (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). thus, senior managers in businesses deal with emerging difficulties, and their distinct qualities have a big impact on the strategic decisions they make. According to Carpenter, Geletikanyes, and Sanders (2004), influential players within an organization influence its tactics and efficiencies, which in turn reflect their values and cognitive foundations. The notion was based on the idea that the knowledge, experience, and skill of strategic leaders has a direct impact on the outcomes of organizations.

#### **Performance Theory**

The theory argues that optimum production is the result of using the best output and price levels that maximize return. The implementation of this theoretical model can be beneficial to a company while also having an effect on customers when that organization decides to raise commodity prices in order to maximize returns (Al-Hawar, 2014). Profit maximization aids in predicting business behavior as well as the impact of various economic variables, such as price and output, in various market conditions (Kaushik & Rahman, 2015). The challenge with this theory is that profits are very unpredictable because they are calculated based on the difference between future sales and expenses. Consequently, it is intolerable for businesses to increase profits in unpredictable times (Dabholkar, 2016).

## Conceptual Framework



## Independent Variables

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design in which data was collected for the objectives of the study. Target population was 37 telecommunication companies registered to operate in Kenya as at December 2024. The sampling frame was management staff of 37 telecommunication firms in Kenya. Stratified random sampling method was used to divide the participants in to homogeneous groups. The Slovin's sample size determination formulas was used to derive the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\alpha)^2} = \frac{148}{1 + 148(0.05)^2} = \sim 108$$

Where:

N = Total population

n = Sample population

$\alpha$  = Sampling error which is 0.05

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires with a five-point Likert scale and a pilot study was conducted on 30 respondents from

## Dependent Variable

Wananchi Ltd in Mombasa. Data was analysed and descriptive and inferential statistics were reported. The multiple linear regression model was as follows;

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y represents organizational performance

$\alpha$  is regression constant, the perceived performance rating when all other factors are zero

$\beta$  represents regression coefficients

$X_1$  represents strategic direction setting practice

$X_2$  represents strategic articulation practice

$X_3$  represents strategic intelligence leadership practice

$X_4$  represents strategic thinking practice

$\epsilon$  represents error term

## FINDINGS

### Descriptive Analysis Results

This study carried out the following descriptive statistics; mean, standard deviation of all the study variables.

#### Strategic Direction Setting Practice

**Table 1: Strategic Direction Setting Practice**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The company regularly reviews the vision statement	84	4.25	.890
The moral purpose of the company is spread across the company	84	4.76	.738
The organizational goals set by the management are feasible	84	4.61	.491
The company has a written mission statement which shows who we are and who we serve	84	3.92	.934
Grand mean		4.68	

From the results, an overall mean of 4.38 (rounded off to 4-Agree) implies that respondents agreed that strategic direction setting practice affects performance of telecommunication firms in Mombasa county. In comparison, Alosani, et al.

(2019) revealed that strategic leadership practices have a significant effect on organizational success because they can prompt the company to take creative and constructive measures.

#### Strategic Articulation Practice

**Table 2: Strategic Articulation Practice**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Goals of the firm are communicated to employees through strategic conversations	84	4.37	.803
Managers constantly talk to the staff about where we are going and how they can contribute	84	3.99	.912
There is setting up of strategy meetings separate from the cycle of operational meetings to motivate employees	84	4.07	.962
The desired firm goals outcome is communicated to the employees often	84	3.99	1.114
Grand	84	4.11	

From the results, an overall mean of 4.11 (rounded off to 4-Agree) implies that respondents agreed that strategic articulation practice affects performance of telecommunication firms in Mombasa county. The results agree with the

findings of Kirimi & Minja (2015) that the foundation of strategic leadership practice is in observing the values, ethics, codes, morals and standards of the organization.



## Strategic Intelligence Leadership Practice

**Table 3: Strategic Intelligence Leadership Practice**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The management has adequate knowledge of the prevailing culture	84	3.99	.898
The management develop networks with employees to foster improvement	84	4.15	.912
The acceptable values of the company are shared to all employees	84	4.13	.889
Management identifies feelings and concerns of company employees	84	4.14	.971
Grand		4.10	

From the results, an overall mean of 4.10 (rounded off to 4-Agree) implies that respondents agreed that strategic intelligence leadership practice affects performance of telecommunication firms in

Mombasa county. The findings are supported by Musyimi (2016) who found out that strategic intelligence leadership affects firm performance.

## Strategic Thinking Practice

**Table 4: Strategic Thinking Practice**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategic thinking process considers the interests of all stakeholders	84	4.11	.814
Past short comings are used in the improvement of future strategic plans	84	3.63	.979
The institution managers are open to new ideas	84	3.98	.788
The goals of the company and employee needs are well aligned	84	3.19	.925
Grand		3.73	

From the results, an overall mean of 3.73 (rounded off to 4-Agree) implies that respondents agreed that strategic thinking practice affects performance of telecommunication firms in Mombasa county. In comparison, Nel (2017) found that the core

challenge for organizations is to provide sufficient clear structure to ensure that all people in the organization are familiar with and willing to endorse good strategic leadership practices.

## Organizational Performance

**Table 5: Organizational Performance**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Increase in market share	84	4.11	.944
Improved efficiency	84	3.71	.899
Reduction in operational costs	84	3.60	.494
Increase if profitability	84	4.11	.944
Minimization of waste	84	4.01	.885
Grand		3.91	

From the results, an overall mean of 3.91 (rounded off to 4-Agree) implies that respondents agreed that there was improved performance as a result of

strategic management practices in telecommunication firms in Mombasa county.

### Correlation Analysis Results

**Table 6: Correlation Coefficient**

		Strategic direction setting	Strategic articulation practice	Strategic intelligence leadership	Strategic thinking practice	Organizational performance
Strategic direction setting	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	1 84				
Strategic articulation practice	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	.884** .000 84	1 84			
Strategic intelligence leadership	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	.636** .000 84	.840** .000 84	1 84		
Strategic thinking practice	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	.870** .000 84	.678** .000 84	.486** .000 84	1 84	
Organizational performance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	.680** .000 84	.691** .000 84	.676** .000 84	.612** .000 84	1 84

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Correlation results showed a strong, positive linear relationship between strategic direction setting ( $r=0.680$ ,  $P=0.000$ ), strategic articulation practice ( $r=0.691$ ,  $P=0.000$ ), strategic intelligence leadership ( $r=0.676$ ,  $P=0.000$ ), strategic thinking practice ( $r=0.612$ ,  $P=0.000$ ) and organizational performance. This implies that a unit increase of strategic direction setting practice, strategic articulation practice, strategic intelligence

leadership practice and strategic thinking practice positively and significantly affects performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. The results support findings by Alosani et. al. (2019) whose study revealed that strategic leadership practices have a significant effect on organizational success because they can prompt the company to take creative and constructive measures.

### Model Summary

**Table 7: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.805 <sup>a</sup>	.648	.594	.134

a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic thinking practice, Strategic intelligence leadership, Strategic articulation practice, Strategic direction setting

The model implies strategic management practices account for 64.8% ( $R^2=0.648$ ) in the performance of telecommunications firms in Mombasa county. The remaining 35.2% are as a result of other factors not considered in the current study. The results are

supported by Ndunge (2014) whose study on strategic leadership practices and Kenya Wildlife Service performance revealed a strong regression between strategic leadership constructs and performance.

**Table 8: Analysis of Variance**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.015	4	5.254	36.234	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	11.421	79	.145		
	Total	32.436	83			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic thinking practice, Strategic intelligence leadership, Strategic articulation practice, Strategic direction setting

The results show that the model was statistically significant and thus the model is a good fit and hence the results can be relied upon.

**Table 9: Regression Coefficients**

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Hypotheses test
1	(Constant)	.721	.132		5.483	.000	
	Strategic direction setting	.307	.103	.270	2.984	.004	Accept Ho
	Strategic articulation practice	.295	.061	.417	4.797	.000	Accept Ho
	Strategic intelligence leadership	.204	.029	.339	6.915	.000	Accept Ho
	Strategic thinking practice	.122	.061	.129	2.000	.022	Accept Ho

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational performance

The derived model was:

$$\text{Performance} = .721 + .307X_1 + .295X_2 + .204X_3 + .122X_4$$

Multiple linear regression results indicated that strategic direction setting ( $B=0.307$ ,  $p=0.004$ ), strategic articulation practice ( $B=0.295$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), strategic intelligence leadership ( $B=0.204$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and strategic thinking practice ( $B=0.122$ ,  $P=0.022$ ) positively and significantly affect performance of telecommunications firms in Mombasa county. This implies that a unit increase of strategic direction setting practice, strategic articulation practice,

strategic intelligence leadership practice and strategic thinking practice positively and significantly affects performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. This is supported by Alosani, Yusoff & Al-Dhaafri (2019) who found out that strategic leadership practices have a significant effect on organizational success. Consequently all null hypotheses were rejected. Thus, the study confirmed that strategic leadership practices have a positive significant effect on the performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya.

## CONCLUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concluded that;

- Strategic direction setting practice positively and significantly affect performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Strategic articulation practice positively and significantly affect performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Strategic intelligence leadership practice positively and significantly affect performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Strategic thinking practice positively and significantly affect performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.

The study recommends that;

- Managers should practice strategic direction setting so as to increase the performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Managers should practice strategic articulation so as to increase performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Managers should practice strategic intelligence leadership so as to increase the performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.
- Managers should practice strategic thinking so as to increase the performance of telecommunications firms in Kenya.

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