



The Role of Strategic Leadership Style on Compliance with Public Service Ethics in the County Governments of Kenya

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Abstract

The demand for ethics in business and organizations has put a premium on leadership turning ethical leaders into a highly valued commodity. This demand is in response to the pervasive business and organizational failures experienced at the beginning of the twenty-first century blamed largely on unethical conduct. The nexus of leadership and ethical values has attracted wide interest in research and leadership practice mainly because leaders seek to influence and attain positive impact in all processes. The aim of the study was to establish the relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance in the County Governments of Kenya. The study was anchored on Strategic Leadership Theory. The study used positivism paradigm which is based on real facts, objectivity, neutrality, measurement and validity of results. The target population of the study was all the 47 County Governments of Kenya. The total study sample is the product of the County sample and the eight selected Counties which is 584 respondents while the unit of analysis was permanent County employees randomly selected based on duty station at major towns. The respondents indicated that strategic leadership was considered to be of moderate importance in County Governments by employees across levels. Results indicated that the relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance had a strong

association between strategic leadership predictor variables and dependent variable (public service ethics compliance). Visioning was rated lowest (3.76%) than other sub-variables of strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leader character that were all rated above 4 percent. When compared, individual sub-variable effects show that visioning has the highest effect on public service ethics compliance followed by leader character. Analysis of the relationship indicated presence of a strong positive and significant association. The study recommends that the government addresses the identified issues as policy priorities for strategic leadership to service as a control of unethical behavior and ultimately corruption in County Governments and the broader public service. The Government should also structure County Integrated Development Planning to include input of specific reference groups such as professional associations based in the Counties.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Public Service Ethics Compliance, County Governments & Kenya.*

1. Introduction

The world has experienced increasing demand for leaders who observe ethics not only in society but also in private business and public sector organizations. The demand for ethics in business and organizations has put a premium on leadership turning ethical leaders into a highly valued commodity (Northouse, 2017). This demand is in response to the pervasive business and organizational failures experienced at the beginning of the twenty-first century blamed largely on unethical conduct (Ahmed, Othman, & Shanmugan, 2016; Copeland, 2015). The scandals related to ethical lapses did not spare the public sector which experienced unprofessional behaviour with widespread patronage, misuse of funds and outright corruption by public officials (UNDP, 2015). These ethical failures were a real crisis that Ahmed et al (2016), asserted needed overcoming by restoring ethical business leadership.

Leadership from a business perspective, is referred to as strategic leadership and is differentiated from other types of leadership by unique skills and competencies (Norzailan, Othman & Ishizaki, 2018). These distinct competencies include organizational leadership, strategic thinking, change orientation, influence by persuasion and talent development that requires creativity while considering new ways to achieve short and long term goals. In a synthesis of sustainable leadership, Hallinger and Suriyankietkaew (2018) revealed concepts that are important to strategic leadership that include; emphasis on leadership rather than individual leader, long-term vision, innovation capacity, systemic change, ethical behaviour, broader goals of leaders and organizations that link to society and building and engaging stakeholders.

The nexus of leadership and ethical values has attracted wide interest in research and leadership practice mainly because leaders seek to influence and attain positive impact in all processes (Littman & Littman, 2017). Ethical leadership has been defined by Chandler (2009) as the organizational leadership process by which leaders act in a manner consistent with agreed upon standards of character, integrity and decency, which enables upholding of clear legal standards that are ascertainable in order to foster the common good over personal self-interest. As the opposite of ethical behaviour Chandler (2009) defined unethical leadership as behaviour where organizational leadership is a process by which leaders act in a manner that is inconsistent with agreed upon standards of character, integrity and decency that enables upholding of clear legal standards that are ascertainable but instead fosters distrust because of personal self-interest. Scholars in the western world have studied ethics since antiquity (Schaubroeck & Malonson,

2013). Similarly, in Africa, traditional moral and ethical principles were orally handed down from one generation to another and helped to maintain social order and stability (Udokang, 2014).

Public service ethics or ethics with an embedded public service purpose refers to the consideration of norms, values, standards and ethics in public life that public service employees are expected to observe while serving in government (Rothstein & Sorak, 2017). The public service is conceptualized as all the services offered by or on behalf of the government and not just those offered by the civil service (Kilelo, Beru, & Nassiuma, 2015).

1.1.1 Strategic Leadership Style

The extant literature presents leadership style as a leader's way of directing, inspiring and motivating people to achieve desired goals. Strategic leadership is defined variously as a style, process, ability, state and practice that relies on strategic thinking. As a style, strategic leadership acts as an integrator, net caster, focused visionary, focused performer, prioritizer, dreamer, implementer and maintainer (Neumann & Neumann, 1999). The strategic leadership process is a disciplined approach to getting organizations to focus on results. Strategic leadership is a process by which goals are defined and implemented successfully (Clausen & Kragh, 2018). Further, Jabbar and Hussein (2017) defined strategic leadership as a process of launching the firm or organization into a desired future from the prevailing state. Strategic leadership is also perceived as ability to influence others to make decisions that enhance the prospects for the organization's long-term success (Schaubroeck & Malonson, 2013). As a state strategic leadership is the characteristics and actions of top organizational leaders comprising the chief executive officer [CEO] and the top management team responsible for developing and implementing the firm's strategic direction (Tochman, Campbell & Hansin, 2015).

1.1.2 Public Service Ethics Compliance

Public service ethics are the broad norms that delineate how public servants as agents of the state and as members of a profession should exercise judgment and discretion in carrying out their official duties (Engida & Bardill, 2013). Public Service Ethics is also considered a rigorous reflection and articulation of morality in governance (Hijal-Moghrabi & Sabharwal 2018). Compliance with public service ethics means practicing altruism, honesty, empathy, empowerment, fairness, and justice (Copeland, 2015). For Robinson, Cadzow and Kirby (2018), ethical behaviour is being consistent with principles and values as differentiated from moral behaviour. However, Baxter, Dempsey, Megone, and Lee, (2018) posit that ethics, morality and integrity are closely related since a person with sound moral character exhibits ethical behaviour and is also considered to be a person of integrity. Menzel (2012) avers that people of integrity live by ethics. In the public sector, Rothstein and Sorak, (2017) describes public service ethics as the impartiality, transparency, integrity, legality, equality of treatment, loyalty, reliability and professionalism that includes meritocracy, competence and performance that public officials show while they service citizens. In the reviewed literature ethics is shown to encompass all the other constructs and is therefore the desired behaviour in the conduct of public business hence the current study is about compliance with public service ethics.

1.1.3 County Governments of Kenya

County Governments are devolved lower levels of government of Kenya established in 2013 in accordance with the 2010 Constitution of Kenya [CoK] (Juma, Korir & Mulongo, 2014). The objectives of devolution as provided for in Articles 174 and 175 are to promote democracy and

accountability in the exercise of power, fostering national unity by recognizing diversity, enhancing people's self-governance, enabling communities manage their own affairs, protecting and promoting interests and rights of minorities and the marginalized and ensuring equitable sharing of resources.

The study focused on whether strategic leadership which was introduced into public service through the public sector reforms is effective in influencing compliance with public service ethics at the County Governments of Kenya. Respondents were county government officials across all the 47 Counties in Kenya using a representative sample of eight counties, one drawn randomly from each of the regions so that Nairobi in Nairobi region, Nyeri in Central, Nakuru in Rift Valley, Meru in Eastern, Kilifi in Coast, Garissa in North Eastern, Kisumu in Nyanza and Bungoma in Western regions were included in the sample.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

The most pressing problem in Kenya is unethical behaviour manifesting mostly as corruption in the public service (Onyango, 2019). Understandably, researchers, leadership practitioners and citizens are equally concerned about the spiraling ethical problems that are increasing despite government legal-administrative reforms and stakeholders' interventions. Evidence from research and practice posits that the reforms undertaken by Government have failed to reduce wastage of public resources and lost opportunities for development as a result of unethical conduct in Kenya's public service. Ngigi and Busolo (2019) identified challenges to the implementation of devolution as disagreements between the National Government and County government over funding for County functions, poor or absence of consultation on matters that affect County Governments, little technical support for the implementation of functions, insufficient allocation and delayed disbursements of funds to Counties by the National Treasury, lack of capacity and skills to deliver services, corruption, lack of public participation and gender inequality.

Researchers and anti-corruption agents agree that addressing issues such as corruption defies linear interventions. Instead, Yeboah (2016) proposed using an integrated systems approach aimed at creating strong leadership, strong institutions and strong third force such as the media to effectively confront the complex issue of corruption in the public service. As proposed in the current study, strategic leadership promises an effective means of addressing corruption sustainably by ensuring compliance with ethics. Mathenge, (2014) examined the influence of ethics on corruption and findings showed a significant positive relationship between corruption and ethics in the Kenya police force. Other studies in different contexts have shown that ethical strategic leadership has potential of reducing corruption, (Rahmawati & Sarjito, 2020; Onyango, 2019 and Dindi, Munala, Alkizim, Kivaa & Gichure 2018). Further research on public service ethics compliance has revealed both the extent of lack of compliance and prospects of effective approaches.

At the County Government level, Wawire and Chepng'eno (2015); and Mukabi, Barasa, and Chepng'eno (2015) averred that devolution had significantly succeeded, a view supported by UNDP (2015) who praised devolution in Kenya as an example for other developing countries. However, contrary to this view, emerging evidence suggests that County Governments are not adequately addressing the issue of public service ethics compliance. Despite having employees at strategic level after implementation of reforms, blatant unethical conduct has continued to be reported at the County Governments that is impacting negatively on Counties' development (Minja, 2017; Julia, 2016; and D'Arcy & Cornell, 2016).

Previous studies in Kenya on strategic leadership and public service ethics were based on data collected from service beneficiaries and rarely from employees as service providers hence methodologically different from the current study. Others concentrated on the prevalence and scarcely explored relationships which are conceptually different from the current study that focusses on strategic leadership style as a means of addressing public service ethics compliance.

Without sufficient studies and to some extent inconclusive nature of literature on the relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance, there is insufficient evidence to interpret the relationship between strategic leadership and extent of compliance with ethics at the County Governments. The current study therefore sought to establish whether effective strategic leadership style is related to public service compliance that could lead to a reduction in unethical behaviour such as corruption at the County Governments of Kenya. The aim was to address identified gaps by seeking to answer one basic question: How much of variation in employees' compliance with public service ethics is attributable to strategic leadership style in the context of County Governments of Kenya? The evidence generated would be used for policies, programmes and research on the subject.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance in the County Governments of Kenya.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

Strategic Leadership Theory

Strategic Leadership Theory proposed by Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) has genesis from Upper Echelons Theory of (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The theory postulates that a leader's psychological disposition and organization decisions they make are related which can explain strategic leadership in the public sector. The theory predicts higher organization efficiency, effectiveness and stakeholder returns when strategic leaders create and communicate about a vision, and develop and implement strategies to achieve the vision. Strategic leadership theory is applied extensively in the private sector, while the use of the theory in the public sector is traceable to the adoption of New Public Management based public sector reforms. The reforms call for adoption of private-sector management with effect of decentralization of services to lower units, and focus on entrepreneurial leadership and privatization; performance management, evaluation and audit within public service organizations. The paradigm has attracted extensive scholarly attention that exposes the impact of applying strategic leadership theory in the public service.

Engida and Bardill (2012) analyzed progress of the NPM reforms in Sub-Saharan African Countries and concluded that the new public management approach may not be a cure for the problems of public administration. They recommended a wise selection and adoption of some elements of NPM that may be beneficial. Kilelo (2015) agreed with the contention and called for the refinement of NPM-based public sector reforms to fit contexts and address leadership issues rather than abandoning the system which was widely used in Africa. The strategic leadership theory is therefore appropriate to predict the character and practices of strategic leadership which is now extensively adopted in the public sector including County Governments in Kenya.

2.1.2 Empirical Literature review

Strategic leadership style is one of the most extensively used aspects of public sector reforms that helps public sector agencies make strategic choices and implement policies successfully (Hope, 2014). The role of strategic leaders in public service ethics compliance is stated as upholding merit or professionalism, enforcing civil service regulations, strengthening ethics or anticorruption legislation, implementing codes of conduct and securing high level political support (GOK, 2015). This role was re-stated in a study by Waititu (2016) on the key drivers of strategy implementation in Nairobi County in Kenya. Descriptive research design was used with respondents drawn from sampled commercial Banks listed at the Nairobi Securities Exchange. Analysis indicated that leadership style plays a key role in strategy implementation. This style of organizational leadership involves strategic thinking or the cognitive evaluation of information on options being considered before decisions are made on strategies and actions. Service and McEwen (2015) identified the important issues in strategic thinking in view of the need for organizational sustainability in an increasingly volatile worldwide market. They included the need for clarity in thinking using more concise strategy-making models, being more innovative and challenging the limits of what an organization is capable of doing in order to solve the issues faced while focusing on the desirable future.

Studies have shown that strategic leadership creates alignment of interests in order to achieve balanced outcomes for the competing interests and stakeholders. Strategic leaders endear team spirit by setting a compelling vision with clear and high aspirations and targets that inspire high performance (Carucci, 2016; Hau & Yazdanifard, 2015 and Bratianu, 2015). The role of strategic leadership is one of constantly reflecting and analyzing all viewpoints revealing the causes of problems or opportunities for development to formulate interventions prior to implementing the necessary changes to the organization (Sarfraz, 2017). While applying strategic leadership theory Kitonga, Bichanga and Muema (2017) examined the link between strategic leaders practice of determining strategic direction and organizational performance. Data was collected from 328 managers representing Not-for-Profit Organizations here findings showed that determining strategic direction is key for determining performance of Not-or-Profit organizations in Nairobi, Kenya.

Hartley et al (2013) argues that public servants need tact while engaging various stakeholders and use political astuteness or skills in situations involving diverse socio-economic and political interests. Papadakis, (2018) conducted a study on the impact of organizational politics and trust in the top management team on strategic decision implementation success. The study used 228 middle managers from 114 private Greek firms with over 100 employees. Findings were that when organization politics were high, strategy implementation success was reduced but the impact was reduced when the employees had trust with top management. Bradach (2019) established that a clear vision determines very critical functions such as enhancing decision making which facilitates people to determine what is important or trivial, appealing to followers on the fundamental needs, linking and rationalizing ways of doing things, proving meaning to work and establishing a standard of excellence.

Jabbar and Hussein (2017) affirms that it is critical to note that a firm institution statement reflect the values and aspirations that are intended to capture employees' heart and mind and hopefully the stakeholder as well. This therefore denotes that the strategic leadership job is to ensure that the vision and mission of the organization are effectively communicated and adapted by all employees. Hitt, Sirmon and Xu, (2020) affirms that strategic leaders are people located in different areas and

levels of the firm using strategic management process to select strategic actions that help the firm to achieve its vision and fulfill its mission. George and Walker (2019) carried a systematic literature review and found that strategic planning has a positive, moderate, and significant impact on organizational performance. Furthermore, meta-regression analysis suggested that the positive impact of strategic planning on organizational performance is strongest when performance is measured as effectiveness and when strategic planning is measured as formal strategic planning.

2.2 Hypothesis of the Study

H₀₁: Strategic Leadership has no significant relationship with Public Service Ethics Compliance at the County Governments of Kenya

2.1.3 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework indicates a relationship between Strategic Leadership Style as the independent variable and Public Service Ethics Compliance as the dependent variable. The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

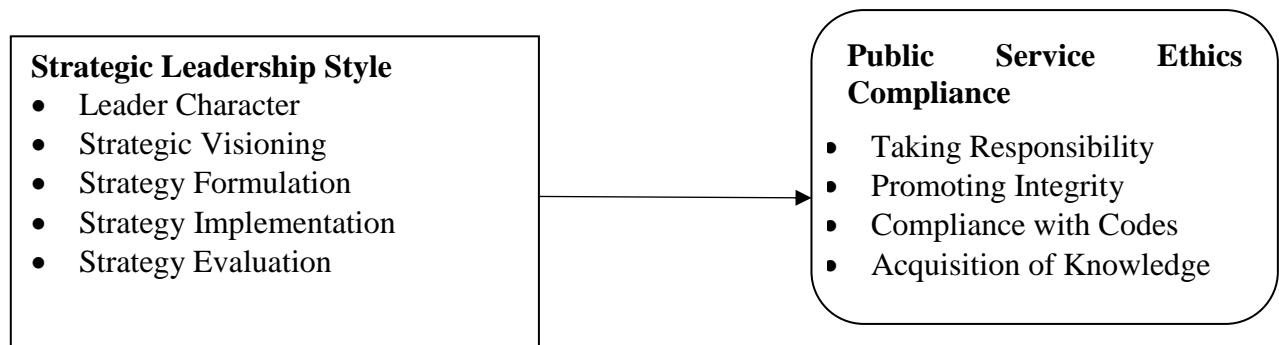


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. Research Methodology

The study used positivism paradigm which is based on real facts, objectivity, neutrality, measurement and validity of results. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted to analyze the relationships among variables and generalization on a target population. The target population of the study was all the 47 County Governments of Kenya. However, a representative sample of eight counties was drawn from the regions of Nairobi, Central, Rift Valley, Eastern, Coast, North Eastern, Nyanza and Western for the study. The unit of analysis was public service employees in the County Governments. The selected County government are in terms of administrative location relatively not homogeneous but represent Kenya's ecological, cultural and other diversities. For example, due to ecological differences the preferences for a County as a duty station by public employees may differ. The opinions of county employees from different County stations and different levels of responsibility are important source of data for the study.

The stratified random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of Counties and employees who were the respondents in the current study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the county government officials from each stratum. The sample for each county was distributed proportionately based on the number of employees at each stratum, where stratum is defined as job level informed by the actual percentage distribution of employees in county governments in Kenya established by SRC (2016) review. The proportional allocation method proposed in Kothari (2014) under which sizes of samples from different strata were proportional to the sizes of the strata applied. The sample sizes for different strata are 16 (strategic leadership), 42 (middle management) and 15 (operational staff) representing strata sizes of 4484, 11618 and 4280 respectively giving a total of 73 respondents for every County. The total study sample is the product of the County sample and the eight selected Counties which is 584 respondents. The unit of analysis was permanent County employees randomly selected based on duty station at major towns. County headquarters were selected to allow access to a large number of employees who are in all different job levels. Table 1 shows the sampled employees.

Table: 1 Sample Distributions

| Job level | Number sampled | Respondents /County | Total |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Strategic Leadership (Chief Officers, Directors) | 4484 | 16 | 128 |
| Middle-Level managers | 11618 | 42 | 336 |
| Operational staff | 4280 | 15 | 120 |
| Total | 20,382 | 73 | 584 |

From the sample size of 584 each County had an equal number of 73 respondents who provided an opportunity to get opinions on strategic leadership from employees in different counties. A representative sample of the population is necessary because it is not possible to obtain a sampling frame of the large number of County employees that are scattered in the Country. The respondents were accessed from County offices based at the Country headquarters located in Nairobi City, Nyeri, Nakuru, Meru, Kilifi, Garissa, Kisumu and Bungoma towns. A sample at each level that is all heads of department, deputies and directors was approached during official working hours of Monday to Friday and the same was done for all other employees guided by the desired percentage for each level and total sample. During data collection, every 2nd strategic level, every 5th management level and every 3rd level employees was picked to be interviewed. Those who chose to fill in the questionnaire themselves were allowed to do so.

The model used to test the statistical significance of the independent variable (strategic leadership style) and the dependent variable (public service ethics compliance) in county governments is described as:

$$PSEC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SLS + \varepsilon$$

Where:

PSEC = Public Service Ethics Compliance

SLS = Strategic Leadership Style (Leader Character, Strategic Visioning, Strategy Formulation, Strategy Implementation and Strategy Evaluation)

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Beta coefficients

ε = Error term

4. Results and Findings

Data for the study were collected from county government employees distributed in eight Counties across the eight administrative regions of Kenya. In total 584 questionnaires were distributed to County Government employees in various departments at their places of work. A total of 482 questionnaires were reasonably and adequately completed representing 83 percent response rate while 102 questionnaires were either not returned or inadequately filled. This response rate was deemed satisfactory as suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2016) who recommends 75 percent as a rule of thumb for minimum responses. The response rate of 82.53% was therefore adequate to infer results to the County Governments of Kenya.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to determine the association between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance. The mean score for each of the independent variables was calculated and the Pearson's correlation obtained using SPSS. The correlations were done at 0.05 significance level with one asterisk (*) or a 0.01 significance level with two asterisks. To determine whether the correlation between variables is significant, the p-value is compared to the significance level used. A significance level (denoted as α or alpha) of 0.05 indicates that the risk of concluding that a correlation exists when, in fact, no correlation exists is 5%. The p-value indicates whether the correlation coefficient is significantly different from 0 or not. The correlation results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

| | | Public Service Ethics Compliance |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Public Service Ethics Compliance | Pearson Correlation | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
| Strategic Leadership | Pearson Correlation | .712** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |

The results indicated that strategic leadership was positively and significantly associated to public service ethics compliance in the county governments in Kenya ($r = .712^{**}$, $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). This implied that since strategic leadership had a positive and significant effect thus an improvement would lead to improvement in public service ethics compliance in the county governments in Kenya.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between Strategic Leadership and public service compliance in the county governments in Kenya. A simple regression model was used to test the statistical significance of the independent variable (strategic leadership style) on the dependent variable (public service compliance) in the county governments in Kenya. The hypothesis stated in the null form is as follows:

H₀₁: Strategic Leadership Style has no significant relationship with Public Service Ethics Compliance at the County Governments of Kenya

The hypothesis sought to establish the relationship between strategic leadership style (SLS) and public service ethics compliance (PSEC) at the County Governments of Kenya. This hypothesis was tested by regressing composite index of PSEC on SLS guided by the equation:

$$PSEC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SLS$$

Where SLS represented composite strategic leadership and PSEC denoted public service ethics compliance.

Table 13: R² of Strategic Leadership Style and Public Service Ethics Compliance

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .832a | 0.692 | 0.689 | 0.1702 |

As presented in the Table 13 the coefficient of determination R² is 0.692. The model indicates that strategic leadership style explains 69.2% of the variation in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments. This implies that there exists a relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance at the County Governments.

Table 14: ANOVA for Strategic Leadership and Public Service Ethics Compliance

| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Regression | 30.999 | 5 | 6.2 | 214.09 | .000b |
| Residual | 13.784 | 476 | 0.029 | | |
| Total | 44.783 | 481 | | | |

As shown in Table 14, F-Calculated (5, 481) = 214.09 which is greater than F-Critical (1, 481) = 3.96 at 95% confidence level. Results also show that p-value = 0.000 < 0.05. This confirms that strategic leadership style positively and significantly influences public service ethics compliance at the County Governments. The low residual of 13.784 means in comparison, strategic leadership style has higher influence than other factors.

Table 15: Strategic Leadership Style and Public Service Ethics Compliance

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 0.131 | 0.119 | | 1.097 | 0.273 |
| Strategic Visioning | 0.265 | 0.046 | 0.253 | 5.727 | 0.000 |
| Strategy Formulation | 0.181 | 0.045 | 0.172 | 4.008 | 0.000 |
| Strategy Implementation | 0.167 | 0.047 | 0.160 | 3.573 | 0.000 |
| Strategy Evaluation | 0.156 | 0.047 | 0.147 | 3.278 | 0.001 |
| Leader Character | 0.214 | 0.046 | 0.206 | 4.635 | 0.000 |

This can be summarized by the following model:

$$\text{PSEC} = 0.131 + 0.265\text{SV} + 0.181\text{SF} + 0.167\text{SI} + 0.156\text{SE} + 0.214\text{LC}$$

Where;

PSEC= Public Service Ethics Compliance

SV= Strategic Visioning

SF= Strategy Formulation

SI= Strategy Implementation

SE= Strategy Evaluation

LC= Leader Character

The results presented in Table 15 show that when strategic visioning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leader character, is held constant, public service ethics compliance at the County Governments will remain at 0.131. At the same time, an increase in strategic visioning by one unit leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.265 units with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. An increase in one unit of strategy formulation leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.181 with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Further, the results indicated that when strategy implementation increases by one unit, public service ethics compliance at the County Governments increases by 0.167 with a p-value of $0.001 < 0.05$. An increase in one unit of Strategy Evaluation leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.156 with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Lastly, an increase in leader character by one unit leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.214 units with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$.

In summary, this implied that strategic leadership constructs of strategic visioning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leader character had an improvement effect on public service ethics compliance due to the positive coefficient. The unitary changes were also found to be statistically significant. The study thus, rejected the null hypothesis and adopted the alternative hypothesis that Strategic Leadership Style has a significant relationship with Public Service Ethics Compliance at the County Governments of Kenya.

4.3 Discussion

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between Strategic Leadership and public service compliance in the county governments in Kenya. A simple regression model was used to test the statistical significance of the independent variable (strategic leadership) on the dependent variable (public service compliance) in the county governments in Kenya.

The study findings showed that when strategic visioning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leadership characteristics, is held constant, public service ethics compliance at the County Governments will remain at 0.131. At the same time, an increase in strategic visioning by one unit leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.265 units with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. An increase in one unit of strategy formulation and selection leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.181 with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. When strategy implementation increases by one unit, public service ethics compliance at the County Governments increases by 0.167 with a p-value of $0.001 < 0.05$. An increase in one unit of Strategy Evaluation leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.156 with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. Lastly, an increase in leadership characteristics by one unit leads to an increase in public service ethics compliance at the County Governments by 0.214 units with a p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The study thus, rejected the null hypothesis and adopted the alternative hypothesis that Strategic Leadership has a significant relationship with Public Service Ethics Compliance at the County Governments of Kenya.

The findings of the study show that other strategic leadership style practices such as strategy formulation, planning, implementation and evaluation are important and are well entrenched in the County Governments of Kenya. This is consistent with Bryson, Edwards and Van Slyke (2018) who analyzed strategic planning in the public sector and observed that increasingly it has been institutionalized as a fairly common practice at all levels of government in the United States and several other countries. Another study conducted by Forseth, Clegg and Røyrvik (2019) indicated the importance of evaluation and found that quantitative systems of evaluation with time easily produced reactivity and resistance among organizational members.

Kenyan studies similarly confirmed the influence of strategic leadership style in organizations. The leader should be able to allow people to contribute, never overbearing and always motivating. By building consensus strategic leaders allow consideration of all views which is in line with Kimutai (2016) who asserted that a good leader listens and takes into consideration team members views. In the context of community development goals must be agreed on by the majority and should be congruent with the aspirations, desires and expectations of the people. Moreover, decision making in project planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation need involvement of the community to ensure sustainability. The findings on importance of leader character in influencing compliance with public service ethics at the County Governments was confirmed. The findings that strategic leadership style has a significant relationship with public service ethics compliance were evaluated and tended to agree with previous studies. For example, Mathenge (2014) who conducted a study seeking to measure corruption and integrity in Kenyan Police Agency using an ethical perspective.

5. Conclusion

The relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance had a strong association between strategic leadership predictor variables (strategic visioning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leader character, and dependent variable (public service ethics compliance). But respondents indicated that strategic leadership was considered to be of moderate importance in County Governments by employees across levels. Visioning was rated lowest (3.76%) than other sub-variables of strategy formulation, strategy implementation, strategy evaluation and leader character that were all rated above 4 percent. When compared, individual sub-variable effects show that visioning has the highest effect on public service ethics compliance followed by leader character. Analysis of the relationship indicated presence of a strong positive and significant association. Following this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected and conclusion made that there is a significant relationship between strategic leadership and public service ethics compliance.

6 Recommendations

In terms of policy, the study recommended that the government should align the public sector reforms with regard to County Governments inter alia address issues of strategic leadership development and addressing human resource management. The government needs to adopt strategic leadership style to improve quality of governance in Kenya by integrating national values and principles of governance in County Integrated and Development Planning processes.

In order to ensure effectiveness of strategic leadership, the government has to reduce restrictive administrative requirements that tend to hinder strategic visioning by County strategic leadership. The Government should also structure strategic planning to include input of specific reference groups such as professional associations based in the Counties.

The study recommends that the government should place departmental leadership responsibility and hold Chief Officers and top management team accountable as accounting officials. As a matter of priority, government needs to further clarify by law the roles and relationship between political leadership and strategic leadership.

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