Influence of Strategic Leadership on the Performance of Public Hospitals in Embu County, Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya's current changing business environment, the importance of strategic leadership in ensuring organizational success and effectiveness cannot be overstated. This study presented a comprehensive analysis of strategic leadership in influencing public hospital performance, with a focus on Embu County. The study sought to determine how strategic leadership influences performance levels, employees, and customer satisfaction in public hospitals. The theoretical framework for strategic leadership was developed using the servant leadership theory. From a target population of 350, consisting of 150 healthcare workers and 200 patients, data was collected using questionnaires from a sample size of 140. The 140 respondents comprised 57.2% of clients/ patients and 42.8% of healthcare workers. The distribution of healthcare workers comprised of the following categories: nurse-in-charge 2.9%, ordinary nurses 17.1%, clinical officers-in-charge 2.9%, ordinary clinical officers 17.1% and public hospital's administrators 2.9%. Descriptive statistics were employed to assess quantitative data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. Ms Excel was also used to draw charts and graphs. The findings of the study showed that 85.0% of healthcare workers and 60.0% of clients agreed that public hospitals' vision and missions affected performance. In addition, 35.0% of healthcare workers and 32.5% of clients agreed that professional specialization impacted the performance of public hospitals. The study recommended public hospitals implement the finest strategic leadership principles, adopt a servant leadership style, implement a robust financial management system, conduct a mandatory review of their strategic objectives, develop a policy on professional specialization and craft measurable, clear, and patient-centered vision and mission statements. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of strategic leadership literature by providing empirical evidence important in fostering organizational success. The insights obtained in the study will have practical implications for public hospital management and Embu County which seek to enhance efficiency in service delivery and ensure overall healthcare workers and customer satisfaction thus fostering sustainable growth.

Key Words: Public Hospitals, Strategic Leadership, County Government

1.0 Introduction

Strategic leadership plays a key role in public institutions by providing organizational direction, effective decision-making and promoting positive outcomes for the community (Bolland, 2017). Strategic leadership involves the organizational executive formulating a mission and vision that makes the firm thrive. This mission and vision formulated by strategic leaders need to be cognizant of the needs and aspirations of the community and ensure the development of future strategic goals and objectives to be achieved (Bolland, 2017). In addition, this makes the organization withstand technological dynamics and economic shifts thus making it competitive (Hunitie, 2018).

Public institutions interact with a wide range of stakeholders like government agencies, citizens, community groups, and employees' representatives. Strategic leaders use mission and vision to unify an organization's stakeholders and provide them with guidance on how to implement strategies. Strategic leadership is integral in impacting organizational performance by cultivating management skills and promoting strategic thinking (Aithal, 2015). This goes a long way in contributing to the attainment of organizational goals. This paper examines the influence of strategic leadership on the performance of public hospitals in Embu County and suggests critical areas to be explored.

1.1 Background

Most nations in Asia and in the West have adopted strategic leadership as an essential management technique. This form of governance is important not only for the business world but also the government as it enhances accountability and effectiveness in both public and private sectors (Höglund et al., 2018). In communicating an organization's goals, a responsive framework based on strategic leadership norms and processes is needed (Ntumbala, 2019). Alayoubi et al. (2020) explored strategic leadership and how it improves educational service quality across public universities. The study found that strategic leadership dimensions and practices improved educational service quality and recommended adopting such in daily routines. Sawhney et al. (2017) explored strategic management using high-education institutions in the public sector as evidence. The study indicated that strategic direction has been formally adopted in higher education institutions globally, but more has been done in the U.S.

It is important to note that establishing institutional links to support strong strategic leadership through public awareness campaigns, technical assistance and education is now done by many African countries (Mukhezakule and Tefera, 2019; Ojogiwa, 2021). Although certain African nations have embraced strategic leadership, there is minimal data showing how strategic leadership is being implemented in the public sector in Africa (Ntumbala, 2019). Strategic leadership in African countries like Kenya may not flourish as expected because of barriers, such as employee inefficiency, lack of accountability on allocated resources, and management scandals (Ameso and Prince, 2022). For instance, in county governments such as Mombasa, Embu, Kilifi, Laikipia, Nairobi and Nakuru, public health workers are issuing strike notices to their employers due to lack of necessary personal protective equipment, not receiving their paychecks, and mismanagement (Ameso and Prince, 2022). However, some of these issues can be resolved once the appropriate leadership strategy is adopted. Kamariah et al. (2013) argue that for proper management of public hospitals, the government must develop strategic administrative and efficient procedures that ensure correct execution of the law. Public hospitals play an important role in providing healthcare services and serve as the cornerstone of the healthcare system (Kenya, 2016). Efficient utilization of resources

allocated to public hospitals is paramount to guaranteeing delivery of high-quality healthcare. In Kenya, there has been increased scrutiny on the level of accountability of public hospitals on allocated resources (Kenya, 2016). This study provides a deeper exploration on the level of accountability within public hospitals in meeting the diverse needs of stakeholders and patients to ensure quality and efficient service delivery.

The study incorporated the servant leadership theory to elaborate the concept of strategic leadership and performance in public hospitals. The theory was proposed in 1977 by Robert Greenleaf. The 1970s-era servant leadership theory contends that leaders are obligated to put their subordinates' interests above their own or the organization. The theory contradicts the top-down directive approach of leadership (Liden et al., 2014). According to the theory, servant leaders don't control their subjects but value and are mindful of their contributions. In this regard, the theory provides the foundation for evaluating leadership strategies used in public hospitals. It is assumed that when positive strategies for valuing subjects are adopted, public hospitals perform better, unlike when they are not.

Despite its positive impacts, the servant leadership theory has been criticized. Feminist scholars argue that the theory supports patriarchal leadership, neglecting feminism. Moreover, some scholars have argued that it has neglected black people, women, and historically alienated individuals in society. According to Dennis et al. (2010), few empirical studies have used the theory to test its propositions. Liden et al. (2014) argue that increased competition among public institutions make managers consider utilizing leadership styles that develop the full potential of their employees. This approach makes a significant number of public institutions to move from autocratic leadership styles to leadership styles that are individualized and cooperative such as servant leadership.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Embu County, efficiency and effectiveness of public hospitals are paramount in addressing the healthcare needs of the citizens. Despite the county government making necessary efforts to improve healthcare services in the county, persistent challenges exist thus the need for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing performance of public hospitals. The Auditor General's Report for the financial year 2021-2022 highlights that Embu County Government had an overdue remittance of Ksh. 500,419,840. This had led to employee's dissatisfaction leading to industrial strikes and a go-slow in public hospitals. The missing link between hospital performance and strategic leadership poses a significant knowledge gap that hinders efforts to improving efficiency in healthcare delivery in Embu County. An understanding of how practices of strategic leadership translate to tangible performance outcomes is essential in implementing targeted interventions and evidence-based decision-making.While studies like Carter and Greer (2013) and Okibo and Masika (2014) have acknowledged the importance of strategic

leadership in steering organizational success, the healthcare and socio-economic landscape of Embu County necessitates a localized investigation. Furthermore, there exists limited empirical evidence of strategic leadership and its impacts on the performance of public hospitals in Embu County. Strategic mechanisms on factors such as professional specialization, accountability, and strategic objectives play significant roles and require further analysis and exploration.

Addressing this gap is crucial in informing policy and practice aimed at enhancing the performance of public hospitals. An analysis and identification of key aspects of strategic leadership that contribute to improving performance will help healthcare administrators, policymakers, and leaders to develop targeted initiatives and interventions. The developed initiatives will contribute to optimizing resource utilization, promoting efficiency in service delivery and improving healthcare outcomes in public hospitals.

1.3 Study Objective

The study objective was to determine the influence of strategic leadership on the performance of public hospitals in Embu County.

2.0 Literature Review

This section provides the empirical literature and the conceptual framework.

2.1 Empirical Literature

Strategic leadership is a concept that scholars need to investigate further, particularly in public hospitals since it is pertinent to influencing performance (Kamariah et al., 2013). Public hospitals are non-profit organizations offering medical services to the society. However, a number of these public hospitals in Kenya are faced with a myriad of challenges. Some of these challenges include: limited resources and complex environments that required public hospitals to adopt a unique style of leadership. Mismanagement in public hospitals means the society will lack provision of fundamental healthcare services thus the essence of strategic leadership.

According to Kirmi and Minja (2010), strategic leadership entails shaping and forming strategic vision and mission with a view to influencing strategic actions such as strategic formulation and implementation. The management adopts these strategic actions to influence performance and competence (p. 40). Recent research and studies by Vera and Crossan (2004); Colbert, Kristof-Brown, Bradley, and Barrick (2008) have shown the importance of incorporating strategic leadership in the management of firms. Further, Wakhisi (2021) concur that strategic leadership makes managers to be strategic leaders thus develop meaning and purpose by developing vision and

mission. According to their discussion, it is evident from their literature that strategic leadership makes leaders achieve strategic goals. Although scholars like Carter and Greer (2013) agree that the utilization of strategic leadership is crucial to the performance of the firm, they argue that strategic leadership is not the only factor that has an impact on the firm's performance.

Strategic leadership generally acknowledges the powers vested in the board members as well as the responsibility of the top-level management in leadership. Despite there being a lot of research around corporate governance, there are insufficient studies on the process of corporate governance in the recent past (Donaldson, 2005). For this reason, this study availed strategic guidelines embedded in strategic objectives and professional specialization that will be useful to managers in public hospitals thus allowing smooth application of strategic leadership.

Strategic leadership not only contributes to effective leadership in public hospitals but also to all kinds of organizations in both private and public sector. Hitt, Haynes and Serpa (2010) note that managers experience difficulties when faced with numerous environmental challenges in the firm. This challenges are caused by the lack of effective implementation of strategic leadership. Besides, Kirmi and Minja (2010) explain that when the leaders fail to sell the vision and mission of the organization to other junior officers, the organization fails to perform as required. Importantly, Okibo and Masika (2014) emphasize that strategic leadership inform on the very existence of the organization. More importantly, a study conducted by Hitt et al. (2005) posits that strategic leadership entails developing effective and achievable mission, vision, strategic objectives and tools for monitoring progress.

A study conducted by Hambrick (2023) points out that strategic leadership should focus on the people with significant responsibilities on accountability and transparency. With regard to this, public hospitals are established for the sole reason of providing healthcare services to the society. As such, the study assessed the need for public hospitals to incorporate and strengthen their vision, mission, strategic objectives, accountability and transparency.

When it comes to strategic leadership, sustainability stands out as a critical element towards ensuring the organization is effective, accountable, transparent and sustainable. As such, Gerras et. al (2010) reinforces that for strategic leadership to work, leaders need to understand the organization's vision and mission. They should also ensure the firm adheres to measures around accountability and transparency on allocated resources. Still, the managers need to possess skills to help identify and address opportunities and threats (Walker, 2013). Doing so promotes the desired organizational goals and objectives in line with strategic leadership. Okibo and Masika (2014) agree that when organizations implement strategic leadership they make the institution acquire competitive advantage thus positively influencing their performance. The strategic leadership process entails selection of the desired business approach, implementation of the approach as well as the analysis of desired approach (Galligan

and Versteeg, 2013). Firstly, choice of the strategic approach deals with the identification of skills and understanding the stakeholder's expectations, visions, mission and financial capabilities (Adzeh, 2017). Secondly, strategic implementation concentrates on the nature of converting organizational strategies into action with regard to the organizational structure, design, planning of resources and management change of strategies (Galligan and Versteeg, 2013). Finally, strategic analysis explores the position of the organizational strategies either existing in the external or internal environment in the firm.

Managers play a dominant role when it comes to strategic management and providing direction in firms (Westphal and Fredrickson, 2001). Most of the studies support the notion that managerial characteristics such as knowledge, experience, cognitive skills and personal traits in one way or another influence strategic leadership and decisions (Finkelstein, 2006). Despite strategy having its roots from the business policy and organizational leadership theory; it plays a critical role in providing decisions that guide firms to overcome both external and internal environmental challenges. Although many scholars in the field of business explore studies on strategic leadership, (Ireland and Miller, 2004) a majority fail to consider its rational comprehensiveness. As a result, the study stood to bridge this gap by providing clarity as far as strategic leadership is concerned particularly in financial accountability.

Gaciri (2015) stresses that professional specialization is significant to the running of the firm since it enhances strategic leadership and the firm's overall performance. Essentially, through professional specialization, top-level management understands how strategic decisions can be effectively implemented (Gaciri, 2015). Due to this reason, the study incorporated an important aspect of individual's experience, in particular, the professional specialization. This aspect helped in providing clarity on the impact of the cognitive ability, type of skill and how these contribute to the profession.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) looked at how the independent (strategic leadership) and dependent (performance of public hospitals) variables affected each other. The independent variable indicators were vision, mission, professional specialization and accountability. These sub-themes informed the influence of strategic leadership on the performance of public hospitals. On the other hand, the dependent variable indicators were the level of customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and operational efficiency. These sub-themes informed the performance of healthcare services provided to the public by public hospitals.
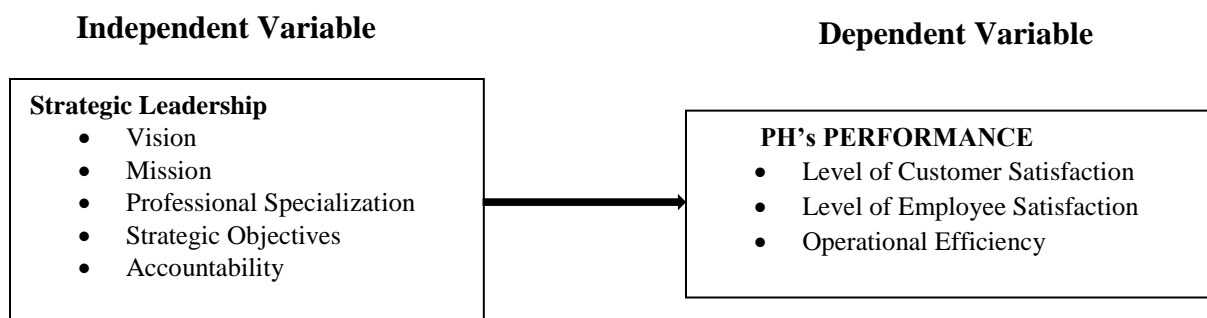
Independent Variable	Dependent Variable

Strategic Leadership
- Vision
- Mission
- Professional Specialization
- Strategic Objectives
- Accountability

PH's PERFORMANCE
- Level of Customer Satisfaction
- Level of Employee Satisfaction
- Operational Efficiency

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author (2020)

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive design to pursue goals and address the social phenomenon under investigation (Lewis, 2015). Sileyew (2019) asserts that a descriptive design ensures the observation and uninfluenced presentation of the study's salient features. The study was conducted in the county of Embu. A target population of 350 was considered sufficient for the study. The target population comprised of 200 patients who had been registered in selected public hospitals for at least 2 days and 150 healthcare professionals who were on duty that week. Embu County Government has 4 sub-counties, the study purposively picked the highest-ranked public hospital from each sub-county. The 4 public hospitals selected in this study were Kiritiri Level 3 Hospital, Runyenjes Level 4 Hospital, Siakago Level 4 Hospital and Embu Level 5 (Teaching & Referral Hospital).

The respondents were identified using a stratified random selection technique from the four public hospitals. This sampling technique involves dividing the target population into subgroups before the researcher chooses unique sample units from each sample group (Iliyasu and Etikan, 2021). The advantage of this method is that it permits comparisons between samples from small and big groups, which lowers sampling error. According to the criterion by Memon et al. (2020), the study incorporated 140 participants who were selected as the study's sample from a target population of 350. For behavioral research (like the present one), Memon et al. (2020) proposed a threshold of larger than 50 and fewer than 500 participants. The sample included 60 healthcare workers on duty that week, and 80 patients admitted for at least two days. The essence of collecting data from healthcare workers was to gain insights into how healthcare services were managed, delivered and coordinated, which was integral in assessing performance in terms of employee satisfaction and efficiency in service delivery. On the other hand, data gathered from patients provided their perspective and understanding on the level of efficiency, and overall satisfaction in service delivery.

Table 1: Sample Size

Category	Designation	Freq.	Percentage	Sample size tally				Sample size	Sample %
				Embu Level 5 (Teaching & Referral Hospital)	Runyenjes Level 4 Hospital	Siakago Level 4 Hospital	Kiritiri Level 3 Hospital		
Public hospitals Health Workers	Nurses-in-Charge	4	1.14	1	1	1	1	4	2.86
	Ordinary Nurses	69	19.71	6	6	6	6	24	17.14
	Clinical Officers-in-charge	4	1.14	1	1	1	1	4	2.86
	Ordinary Clinical Officers	69	19.71	6	6	6	6	24	17.14
	PHs Administrators	4	1.14	1	1	1	1	4	2.86
Total		**150**	**42.84**					**60**	**42.86**
Clients of public hospitals	N	**200**	**57.16**	20	20	20	20	**80**	**57.14**
Grand Total	N	**350**	**100.00**					**140**	**100.00**

Source: Author (2020)

Using self-administered questionnaires, primary data was collected from healthcare workers and patients. Rahi et al. (2019) argues that questionnaires ensure ease of data collection and ability to circumvent time constraints. A total of 60 healthcare professionals and 80 patients responded to the questionnaires respectively. Data cleaning was done, followed by quantitative data analysis. The quantitative results were examined using descriptive statistics and the SPSS version 24.0. Frequencies, mean scores and percentages were used for descriptive statistics.

4. Results

A total of 140 respondents comprising healthcare workers and clients participated in the study. The 140 respondents comprised 57.2% of clients and 42.8% of healthcare workers. The distribution of healthcare workers comprised of the following categories: nurse-in-charge 2.9%, ordinary nurses 17.1%, clinical officers-in-charge 2.9%, ordinary clinical officers 17.1%, and public hospitals administrators 2.9%.

Questions on vision, mission, professional specialization, strategic objectives and accountability were posed to the respondents. The sub-sections below present the findings of the study. Sub-sections 4.1 present findings on the vision and mission's influence on public hospitals' performance, 4.2 professional specializations and their influence

on public hospitals' performance, 4.3 strategic objectives review on determining the future direction of public hospitals, and steps public hospital management can take to ensure they develop strategic objectives that enhance performance and 4.4 accountability rating on how public hospitals use allocated resources.

4.1 Vision and Mission

Table 2: Visions and Missions Set by Public Hospitals Influence Performance

Stakeholders	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Health Workers Freq.	3	3	3	51	0	**60**
Health workers (%)	5.0	5.0	5.0	85.0	0	**100.0**
Clients Freq.	2	7	4	19	48	**80**
Clients (%)	2.5	8.8	5.0	23.8	60.0	**100.0**

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table (2) reveals that 5.0% of health workers strongly disagreed that visions and missions in public hospitals influence performance, 5.0% disagreed, 5.0% neither agreed nor disagreed and 85.0% agreed. This meant that public hospitals needed to formulate clear, measurable and achievable vision and mission that enhance performance. One of the respondents (healthcare workers) at Kiritiri Level 3 Hospital agreed "…yes, public hospitals have visions and missions but the questions is; are they operational or effective in influencing positive performance? Some of them are not reviewed on a regular basis..."

In addition, Table (2) further shows that 2.5% of clients strongly disagreed that vision and mission influenced performance, 8.8% disagreed, 5.0% neither agreed nor disagreed, 23.8% agreed and 60.0% strongly agreed. Clients of public hospitals strongly believed for hospitals to perform, they must have a vision and mission. According to one of the respondents (patient) at Siakago Level 4 Hospital, "…yes vision and mission influences performance in public hospitals, nonetheless, the government and all stakeholders need to ensure that this visions and missions are effective. Even if public hospitals have visions and missions that make sense, we need drugs in our public hospitals. The healthcare workers' welfares need to be looked into and healthcare workers need to be trained on public relations and management skills..." These study findings on vision and mission are consistent with the findings of Okibo & Masika (2014).

4.2 Professional Specialization

Table 3: Professional Specialization in Public Hospitals Influence on Performance

Stakeholders	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Health Workers Freq.	7	10	17	21	5	**60**

Health workers (%)	11.7	16.7	28.3	35.0	8.3	**100.0**
Clients Freq.	1	4	12	37	26	**80**
Clients (%)	1.3	5.0	15.0	46.3	32.5	**100.0**

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table (3) reveals that 11.7% of healthcare workers strongly disagreed that professional specialization influenced performance, 16.7% disagreed, 28.3% neither agreed nor disagreed, 35.0% agreed and 8.3% strongly agreed. This meant that adequate professional specialization in public hospitals influenced healthcare workers' performance. In addition, the table further reveals that 1.3% of clients strongly disagreed that professional specialization influenced performance, 5.0% disagreed, 15.0% neither agreed nor disagreed, 46.3% agreed and 32.5% strongly agreed. This meant that professional specialization influenced performance. One of the respondents (patient) at Embu Teaching & Referral Hospital, "…if we need good performance in public hospitals, health workers should receive training on administration and management..." The study findings on professional specialization are consistent with a study conducted by Alayoubi et al. (2020), indicating that such practices improve the quality of service in public institutions.
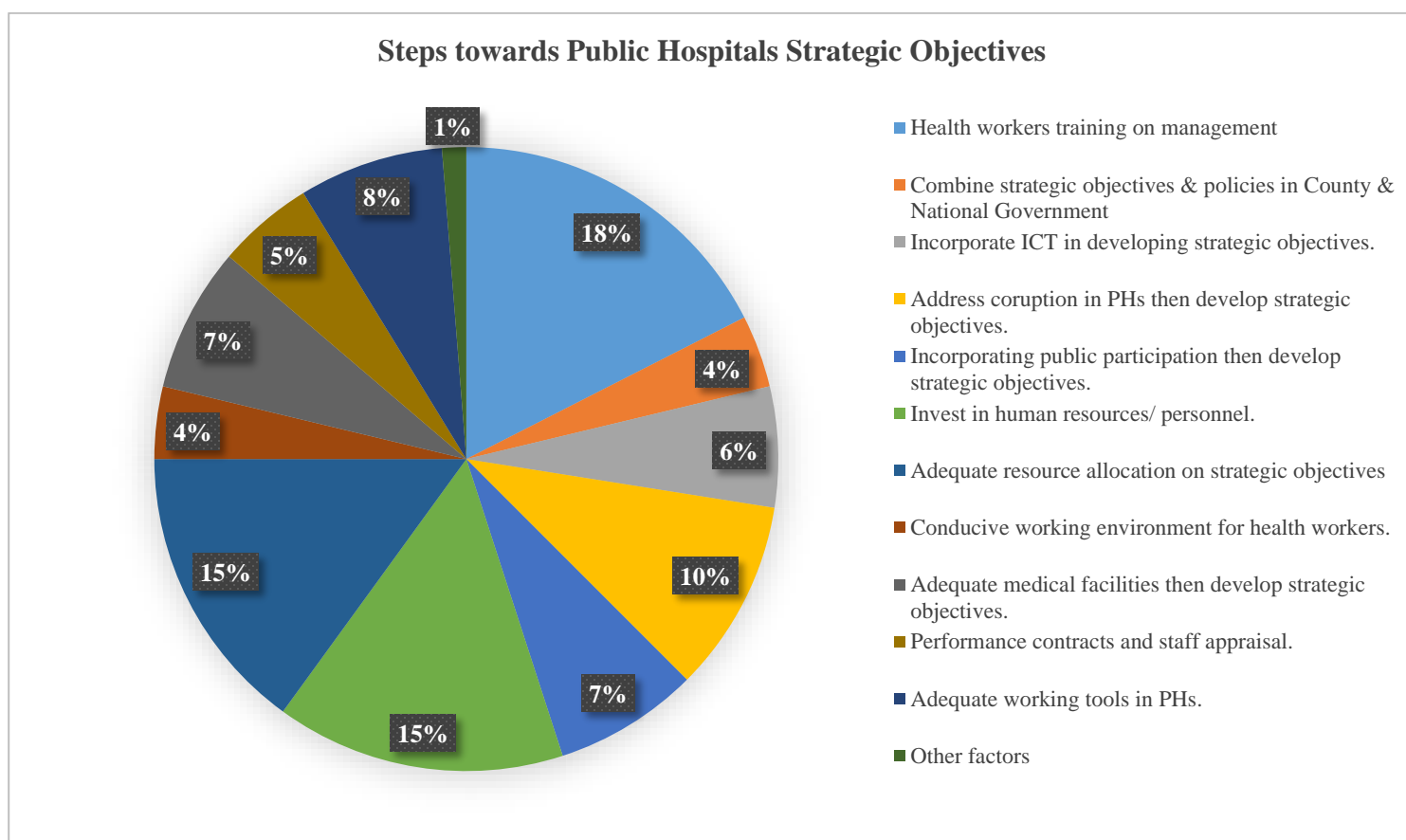
4.3 Strategic Objectives

Figure 2: Review of Public Hospital's Strategic Objectives to Determine their Future Direction (Healthcare Workers)
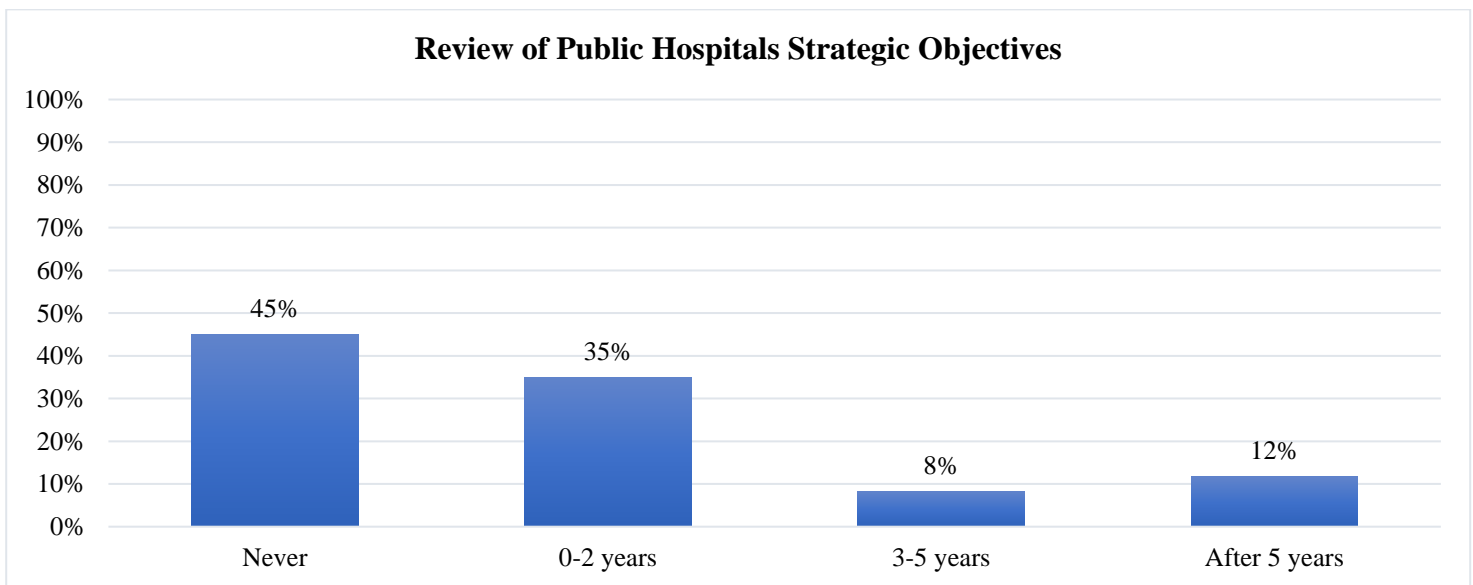
Source: Field Data (2021)

Figure (2) reveals that 45.0% of healthcare workers felt that public hospitals strategic objectives had never been reviewed, 35.0% reviewed between 0-2 years, 8.0% reviewed between 3-5 years while 12.0% reviewed after every 5 years. With regards to assessing how often public hospitals reviewed their strategic objectives, across the data, there was a significant difference in the scale; however, a majority of the respondents admitted to never been reviewed thus influencing performance in public hospitals. The findings are consistent with those of Lola and Paul (2018), who stresses the need for reviewing strategic objectives to promote good organizational performance.

Figure 3: Steps Public Hospitals Management can Take to Ensure they Develop Strategic Objectives that Enhance Performance (Patients)
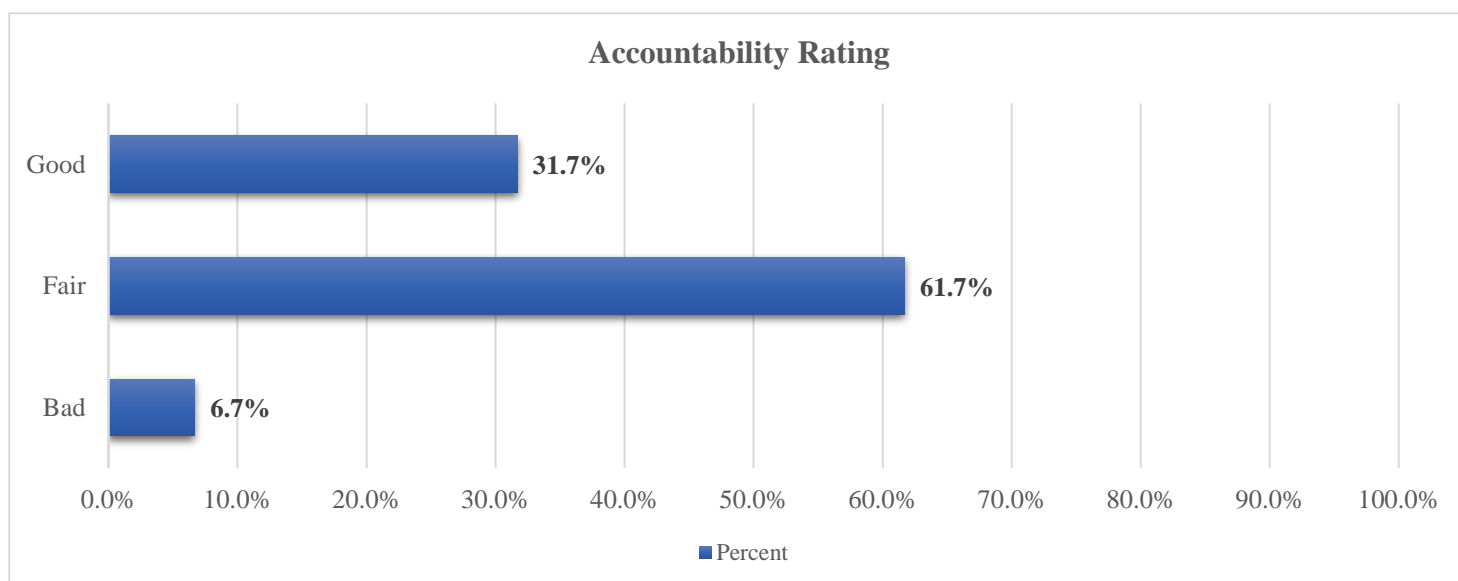

Source: Field Data (2021)

Figure (3) reveals that 17.5% of patients felt that, in developing strategic objectives, public hospitals needed to train healthcare workers on management skills to create awareness on strategic objectives, 3.8% combine County and National Government strategic objective policies in management, 6.3% incorporate ICT in developing strategic objectives, 10.0% first deal with corruption in public hospitals, 7.5% ensure public participation in developing

strategic objectives, 15.0% invest in human resource/ personnel, 15.0% allocate adequate resources towards supporting set strategic objectives, 3.8% provide a conducive working environment for healthcare workers, 7.5% provide adequate healthcare facilities before developing strategic objectives, 5.0% apply performance contract and staff appraisals for members of staff, 7.5% ensure availability of adequate working tools in public hospitals and 1.3% cited other factors. This meant that, there was a need to train healthcare workers on management to create awareness on hospital strategic objectives. The above strategic objectives' findings align with those of Sritoomma and Wongkhomthong (2021) that developing practical and realistic strategic objectives, and mechanisms for tracking success are significant in influencing organizational performance.
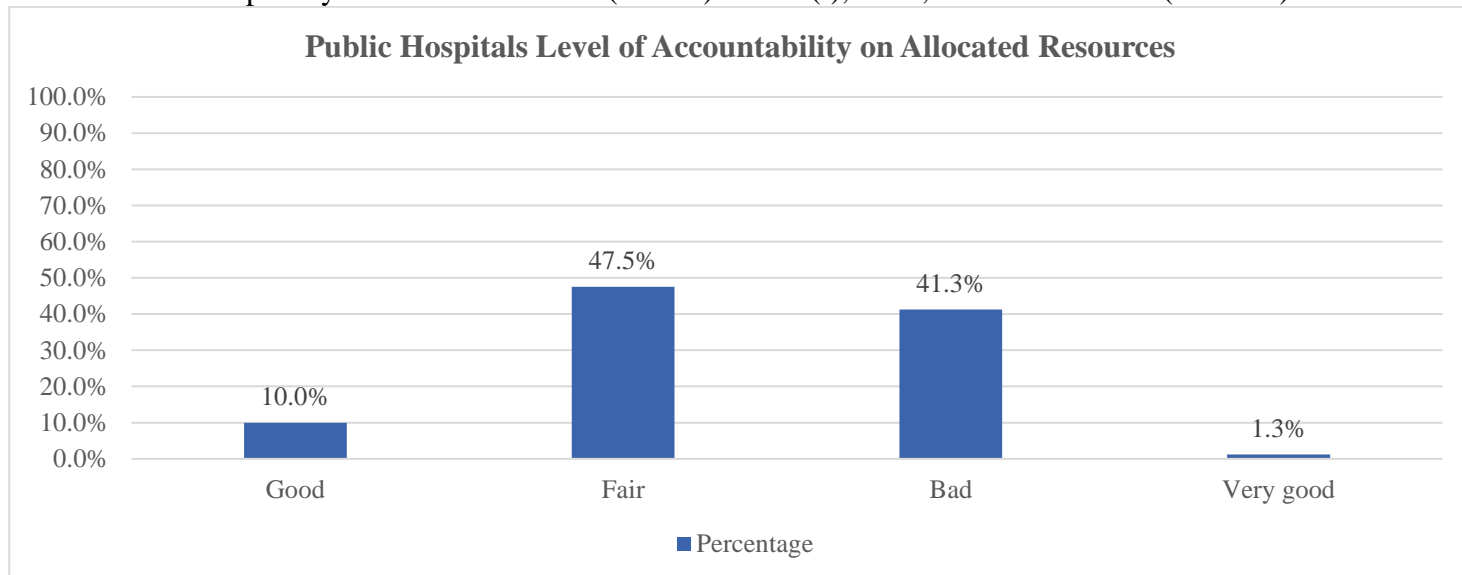
4.4 Accountability

Figure 4: Public Hospitals Level of Accountability on Allocated Resources (Healthcare Workers)

Source: Field Data (2021)

Figure (4) illustrates that 6.7% of healthcare workers felt that the level of accountability on allocated resources in public hospitals was bad, 61.7% fair while 31.7% good. By the level of accountability being fair meant that healthcare workers were not adequately satisfied that public hospitals used allocated resources prudently. According to one of the respondents (healthcare workers) at Kiritiri Level 3 Hospital, "…Public hospitals need to be adequately funded to ensure their operations and programs work smoothly. The allocated resources need to be used prudently…".

Figure 5: Public Hospitals Level of Accountability on Allocated Resources (Patients)

Public Hospitals Level of Accountability on Allocated Resources

Source: Field Data (2021)

Figure (5) reveals that 10.0% of patients felt that the level of accountability on allocated resources in public hospitals was good, 47.5% fair, 41.3% bad and 1.3% very good. By the level of accountability being fair meant that patients were not adequately satisfied that public hospitals use allocated resources prudently. One of the respondents (patient) at Embu Teaching & Referral Hospital highlighted, "…it is difficult to contemplate why pharmacies in most public hospitals lack drugs yet they are funded by the government..."

5. Discussion

This study revealed that 85.0% of healthcare workers agreed that the vision and mission of public hospitals influenced performance. Public hospitals needed to formulate clear and achievable vision and mission to enhance performance. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Lola and Paul (2018), who agreed that strategic leadership influences performance by establishing a practical, measurable and achievable mission, vision and strategic objectives. Okibo and Masika (2014) also agreed with this study's findings, arguing that organizational vision and mission influence strategic leadership direction and impact the organization's essential existence and performance. This study revealed that 35.0% of healthcare workers agreed that professional specialization influenced performance. This meant that professional specialization in public hospitals influences performance. Further, this study revealed that 46.3% of patients agreed that professional specialization affected performance. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Sritoomma and Wongkhomthong (2021), who stressed that professional specialization is a significant factor in firm's operations as it promotes effective leadership and performance.

The study highlighted that 45.0% of healthcare workers felt that public hospitals' strategic objectives had never been reviewed. However, across the data, there was a significant difference in the scale but a majority of the respondents admitted to never been reviewed thus influencing performance in public hospitals. The findings are consistent with those of Lola and Paul (2018), who argues that strategic leadership influences performance as it ensures formulation of effective strategic objectives.

In developing strategic objectives, 17.5% of patients felt that, public hospital's management needed to capacity build healthcare workers on organizational management to create awareness of hospital strategic objectives. The above finding on strategic objectives' align with those of Sritoomma and Wongkhomthong (2021) that developing practical and realistic strategic objectives influences the firm's performance. On accountability rating, 61.7% of healthcare workers and 47.5% of patients felt that the level of accountability on allocated resources was fair, meaning they were not adequately satisfied that public hospitals used allocated resources prudently. These findings are consistent with those of Finkelstein (2006) who argue that managerial characteristics such as individual personal traits on integrity and accountability, in one way or another influence strategic decisions.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents a summary of the conclusion and corresponding recommendations.

6.1 Conclusions

It is evident in the study that strategic leadership influenced performance of public hospitals. The study findings revealed several management loopholes and challenges in public hospitals, including accountability of allocated resources, development and review of strategic objectives, professional specialization, effective visions and mission, and training/ capacity building of healthcare workers. As such, there was a need for managers of public hospitals to undergo capacity building on mentioned areas of strategic leadership. By doing this, the managers could generate meaning and purpose aligning with the County's Department of Health vision and mission. With these skills, managers of public hospitals would effectively implement strategic objectives, comprehend their mission and vision and uphold accountability standards. By improving the public hospitals' performance, quality healthcare and competitive advantage will be fostered.

The absence of effective strategic leadership framework was one of the environmental difficulties public hospital managers had to deal with. Since strategic objectives were tools for tracking progress, they needed to be revised occasionally. As such, they help define the organization's vision and mission when appropriately linked. Given that they were responsible for carrying out organizational strategies, healthcare workers needed to adopt a strategic mindset that allowed them to comprehend customers' expectations. In addition to issues with skills and cognitive abilities, public hospitals were required to close the professional specialization gap. The study also provided

managers in public hospitals with guidelines based on strategic objectives and professional specialization facilitating effective implementation of strategic leadership.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

The study suggests that public hospitals should implement the finest strategic leadership principles to avoid pointless conflicts with stakeholders and lessen customer complaints. This would ensure that public hospitals safeguard their reputations, save money, are accountable, efficient and effectiveness in service delivery. This would ensure that attainment of quality healthcare for all won't be a problem.

The study also advocates for adoption of the servant leadership style, encouraging valuing of employees rather than the organizations or self (managers). In addition, prioritizing the development and growth of employees ensures they have access to opportunities for mentorship and capacity building thus reaching their full potential. By doing this, public hospitals would have healthcare workers who are skilled and motivated. The move would significantly boost public hospitals' performance as workers would be inspired and committed.

On accountability of allocated resources, the study recommends the implementation of a robust financial management system that tracks the allocation and use of resources. This resources include those allocated by the county government and those collected by public hospitals as own-source revenue. This system should allow regular audits, public disclosures on expenditures and transparency in reporting. This would minimize risks of corruption and mismanagement leading to prudent use of public funds.

The study advocates for public hospitals to establish a mandatory review of their strategic objectives. Key stakeholders in the health sector such as the public, hospital administrators, medical staff and representatives from the Department of Health should be involved and continuously consulted. This process should give room for incorporating feedback from the patient's satisfaction survey and ensure hospital's goals align with the current emerging needs and policy changes.

On professional specialization, the study suggests the development of a policy that encourages financial support for healthcare workers in public hospitals to pursue specialization in critical areas/ fields. This could be in form of scholarships or study leaves and geared towards reducing the burden on general practitioners, enhancing the quality of service and ensuring patients have specialized services within Embu County.

The study recommends that public hospitals should ensure they craft measurable, clear, and patient-centered vision and mission statements. The visions and missions should be revised in every three years to reflect the goals and strategic direction of respective public hospitals. A well-defined mission and vision motivates staff and provides the organization with a strategic focus that aligns hospital activities with a broader health policy objective.

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