

# Cognitive Leadership Competencies and Performance of Private Universities in Kenya, A Case of Daystar University

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**Abstract:**-The study focused on cognitive leadership competencies and how it affects performance of faculty/department leaders in private universities in Kenya. A descriptive research design with a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods of research approaches was adopted. Findings for constructs of cognitive leadership competencies revealed critical thinking highly (77.8%) influence leaders' performance, creativity highly (66.7%) influence leaders' performance and problem solving (12) lowly (66.7%) influence leaders performance.

Study concluded that cognitive leadership competency has negative insignificant influence on leaders performance and recommends that university should embrace/enhance capacity development training for leaders in order to develop or enhance their cognitive competency.

**Keywords:** Cognitive leadership competency, Critical thinking, Creativity thinking, Problem solving skills, Performance of private universities

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Organizations today are facing more challenges than ever before and organization continuously grapples with the change to remain competitive (Mutihac, 2010). Jaros (2007) lists fast changing technological environment, workforce diversity, changing customer tastes and preferences and cut-throat competition as complexities confronting management today. These challenges continuously put pressure on organizations leadership calling for effective and competent leadership (Kennedy,2000), thus leadership competencies. According to Yang (2005), leadership competencies include leadership skills, communication skills, persuasive skills and professional skills. Particularly, Yang identifies four categories of leadership competencies common to faculties' members in higher learning institutions. They are personality and disposition, personal knowledge and skill, administrative competency and social responsibility competency (Yang, 2005).

Cognitive leadership competencies relate to leaders reasoning or rational power and ability (Yang, 2005). Different cognitive competencies have variable outcomes under different circumstance and should be adapted to the particular demands of the situation, that is, the particular requirements of

the people involved and the particular challenges facing the organization (Thisera, 2013). Medves (2006) acknowledged that dimension of competencies includes control of general principles, laws, theories and concepts.

Kenya leadership takes a central position within organizations and particularly in private universities because they need to initiate, implement, and evaluate change. According to Tizard (2010), organization performance is a function of leadership competencies which ensures that techniques are put in place to involve and transform individuals through the different change stages as part of normal business. In a supporting argument, Mutung'a (2006) affirmed that effective leadership competencies are a necessity to build a sense of community within the workplace. In this regard, effective leaders in universities not only increase employee retention figures but also improve productivity because faculty staffs are more willing to follow effective leaders, who demonstrate competencies than non-effective individuals. Thus, a leadership competency is not demonstrated in coerce, cajole, threaten, plead, or bargain with their followers, but rather the inability to inspire followers to do what needs to be done (Mutung'a, 2006).

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Considerable scholarly effort have been demonstrated in establishing the link between leadership competencies and organization performance. Scholars (Pettigrew, 2010; Woodman and Cameron, 2001; Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) have raised concern over the lack of leadership competency to deal with emerging administrative challenges facing today's higher learning institutions. According to IBM Global Leadership Report (2016),60 per cent – 70 per cent of current organizations change programs have stagnated or completed beyond scheduled scope denoting failed programs. Particularly, in the last half-decade, Kenyan higher learning institutions have initiated a number of change processes geared towards structural and leadership improvement. CUE Report on status of university education in Kenya (GoK, 2016), reported above 50 per cent success rate in various projects initiated and implemented by universities. However, on the contrary the auditor's report of 2016 pinpoints low implementation and failure rate (stalled projects

or not completed within time, scope or budget) of programs in higher learning institutions. In addition, Kenya's private higher education have also been blamed for not being innovative in developing programs that address current economy demands/driven. These fundamental observations puts leadership competency on the spot, and thus the purpose for the study to determine the effect of cognitive leadership competency. In particular, the study determined the influence of critical thinking, creativity/strategic thinking and, problem-solving skills, as constructs of cognitive leadership competency.

### III. RESEARCH PURPOSE & HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of cognitive leadership competency on the performance of Private Universities in Kenya. This was assessed using a null non-directional hypothesis stated below:

H<sub>1</sub>: Cognitive leadership competency has no significance influence on faculty/department head's performance in Private Universities in Kenya.

### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of leadership cognitive leadership competency has attracted numerous scholarly efforts. Achoch, Gakure and Waititu (2014) conducted a study on the influence of self-awareness leadership competencies on the transformation of public service reform initiatives. They used exploratory research design, a sample size of 178 and primary data obtained through questionnaires. The study found that significance influence of leadership competency on perception of leader effectiveness and follower satisfaction. A study by Khan, Hafeez, Rizvi, Hasnain and Mariam (2012) investigated the relationship of leadership competencies, organization commitment and organization performance using quantitative research design. The study focused on call centres of telecom sector operating in Islamabad and used 245 questionnaires. The findings reported significance relationship between cognitive leadership competency and employee's organization commitment.

Similarly, Moore and Rudd (2011) identified the major leadership competencies skill areas and specific leadership competencies within each skill area needed by Extension leaders. Using purposive sampling techniques and sample size of 7 administrative heads of HLI. The findings identified cognitive among the other six major human competencies: human, conceptual, technical, communication, emotional intelligence, and industry knowledge. Spendlove (2007) conducted a study on competencies and academic leadership in IHL in the United Kingdom. Taking descriptive research design, qualitative and quantitative approach and 207 sample size, the study reported significance influence of leadership competencies on universities and colleges survive and continual development.

The study by Bwoma (2011) titled 'Influence of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of youth group

projects in Kisii Central District' analyzed leadership competencies required for managing youth group projects. Adopting a descriptive survey research design, primary data collected via questionnaires from 21 youth groups and 302 respondents selected using simple random and analysed using simple descriptive statistics. The findings indicated strong influence of leadership competencies, among other management skills, significantly influencing performance.

Sabir, Iqbal, Rehman, Shah and Yameen (2012) conducted a study on the impact of corporate ethical values on leadership competencies and employee performance in Pakistan. The study used three variables namely, corporate ethical values, social awareness leadership competencies and employee performance. The study found reported strong positive correlation between social leadership competencies and employees performance.

### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was based on descriptive research design, with both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. Census of all target population comprising of 18 Faculty and Departmental heads within Daystar University, Kenya. Primary data was obtained through structured questionnaire and both descriptive and inferential statistics.

### VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Descriptive Results.

The study sought to establish how cognitive leadership competency affects the performance of leaders in private university. This analysis was assessed on three elements namely critical thinking, creativity/strategic thinking and problem solving. First, respondents were asked whether they demonstrate cognitive competency in their leadership and whether top management does the same. Finding revealed that 100% (18) agree that they and top management too demonstrate the same. The second level of analysis assessed the influence of cognitive elements. Result for critical thinking, creativity and problem solving elements are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Cognitive leadership competency constructs influence

Response Rating	Critical thinking		Creativity		Problem solving	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Very high	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
High	4	22.2	6	33.3	12	66.7
Low	14	77.8	12	66.7	6	33.3
Very low	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not at all	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	18	100.0	18	100.0	18	100.0

From Table 1, results reveals that 22.2% (4) respondents agreed that for critical thinking lowly influence leaders performance, 77.8% (14) agreed that for critical thinking

highly influence leaders' performance and none for very high, very low and not at all. Further results revealed that 33.3% (6) respondents agreed that creativity lowly influence leaders performance, 66.7% (12) agreed that creativity highly influence leaders' performance and none for very high, very low and not at all. Finally, for problem solving results revealed that 66.7% (12) respondents agreed that problem solving skills lowly influence leaders performance, 33.3% (6) agreed that problem solving skills highly influence leaders' performance and none for very high, very low and not at all. These findings reveals that majority of respondents agrees that critical thinking and creative thinking lowly influences department/faculty leaders' performance and problem solving highly influences their performance. The frequency analysis result of cognitive competency reveals a mean (m=4.67) and standard deviation (std dev=0.485). These findings implied critical thinking and creativity lowly influences department/faculty leaders performance, problem solving highly influence performance and cognitive leadership competency very highly influences leadership performance. The findings are supported by Rahman and Castelli (2013),Karamat (2013), Kariuki (2015),

Khan et al (2012), Okundi (2013). In addition, studies by Donaldson et al, (2003), Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn (2003), Dyck and Frese (2005, Mwaura (2007) and Northouse (2007) findings also agrees with the study finding.

**B. Inferential Results**

Result for this analysis is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Analysis Results

		Cognitive Leadership Competency
Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.557*

\*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Result for Pearson correlation (Table 1) shows that there exist a positive strong correlation of r=0.557, and significance at 95% level of confidence (p=0.016<0.05) between cognitive competency and performance of faculty #/department leaders at Daystar University, Kenya. This finding revealed that cognitive leadership competence has a positive relationship with performance of faculty/departmental leadership in private universities in Kenya. This finding is corroborated by

Regression analysis was performed and result for coefficient of determinant R Square (R<sup>2</sup>) is shown in table 3.

Table 3: R Square (R<sup>2</sup>)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.364 <sup>a</sup>	.133	.134	.17895

a. Performance of faculty/department heads

Findings revealed a R<sup>2</sup> (R square) value of 0.133. This implies that only 13.3% of private universities faculty/department heads performance can be influenced or attributed to cognitive leadership competency constructs. In addition, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) result is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.064	4	.016	19	.02 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	.416	13	.032		
Total	.480	17			

a. Dependent Variable: performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), critical thinking, creativity, problem solving

Findings indicated a higher value of F calculated (Fcal=19>Fcrit=1.333) and significance (p=0.02<p=0.05) denoting the model for fit for the study and cognitive leadership constructs: critical thinking, creativity and problem solving, were ideal determinants of faculty/department leadership performance in private universities in Kenya. Regression beta coefficient results for cognitive leadership competency is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Beta Coefficient Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.427	2.087		1.642	.124
Cognitive	.260	.106	.254	2.094	.022

The results shows a constant value of 3.427 which implied a variation in dependent variable independent of the constructs of the cognitive leadership competency. Furthermore, findings revealed a beta coefficient value of β=0.260. This finding implied a unit change in cognitive leadership competency would results into 0.260 changes in faculty/department head performance in private universities in Kenya. The greater tcal=2.094 > tcrit=1.96 with p=0.022 <p=0.05 denoted a significance change effect. Thus findings failed to accept the null hypothesis as there was significance effect of cognitive leadership competency on faculty/department head's performance in private university in Kenya. Several studies corroborated this finding notably, Karamat (2013), Kariuki (2015),Khan, et al (2012), Okundi (2013),OReilly et al (2010).

The overall model for the study thus was constructed as follows:

$$Y = 3.247 - 0.260X_1$$

Where Y = Faculty/department head performance

X<sub>1</sub>= Cognitive competency

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's purpose was to assess the effects of leadership competencies on performance of faculty/department heads in private universities in Kenya. The study concluded that cognitive leadership competency significantly affects the performance of faculty/department heads in private universities, Kenya, as demonstrated by high influence of critical thinking, creativity, problem solving.

Thus the study recommended top university management to emphasize on development of middle level managers (faculty/department head) cognitive leadership competencies in order to enhance creativity programme design

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