

Influence of Democratic Leadership Style on the Performance of Agricultural Enterprises in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

A performance evaluation of agricultural enterprises in Kenya was conducted to assess the influence of democratic leadership style. The assessment of agricultural enterprises' performance in Kenya encompassed both financial and non-financial indicators. The overarching aim of the research was to assess the influence of democratic leadership style on the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya. The study was guided by the Systems Theory, Path Goal Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. The study evaluated the influence of Democratic leadership style on the Performance of Agricultural Enterprises in Kenya. Explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was adopted using cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were gathered using closed-ended questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered using interview guides and focused group discussion guides. A stratified random sample of 222 leaders and employees was selected from a population of 525 leaders and employees drawn from a census of 105 agricultural enterprises for the quantitative study. Qualitative data drew a sample of 40 participants. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics as provided for in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28.0.1. The overall findings of the study show that agricultural enterprises in Kenya perform better under democratic leadership style. The study recommends the implementation of Democratic Leadership Style by governments, donors, and capacity building organizations to enhance the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya.

Keywords: Financial parameters, Non-Financial Parameters, Democratic Leadership Style

INTRODUCTION

Like any other business, agriculture is a venture that exists to provide revenue for its owners. Agricultural businesses provide farmers with a range of goods and services. The services provided include post-harvest, aggregation, access to farm inputs, and items for crop and animal protection. Most agricultural businesses are microbusinesses, with less than ten workers and a yearly revenue of less than five million Kenyan Shillings (Central Bank of Kenya, 2023). How these businesses carry out their objectives will determine how successful they are. As a result, they hire several employees to oversee the company's divisions. It has been noted that a wide range of elements influence an organization's ability to achieve its goals. Agricultural companies' leadership styles have been discovered to affect worker performance, which has a direct impact on the company's capacity to meet goals (Northouse, 2019).

Due to the diverse backgrounds of agricultural business owners, an assessment was needed to determine

how well-versed they were in appropriate leadership philosophies that may maximize business success. It is not mandatory for Kenyan agricultural company owners to follow any set of rules to register and run their companies. As a result, many currently operating agricultural businesses lack well-defined organizational structures that ensure staff members are motivated to continue making their services. As a result, businesses that flourish briefly before stagnating or closing completely due to a lack of leadership have proliferated. Organizations that work with these companies should therefore aim to apply enterprise leadership development.

Many leadership philosophies have been examined in relation to how they affect business performance (Northouse, 2019). According to studies, executives should use a variety of leadership philosophies depending on the situations within the company. To reach the best possible organizational outcomes, Velu et al. (2017) contend that leaders must choose the most appropriate leadership style based on the specific circumstances within the organization. Many academics have claimed that effective leaders should change their style of leadership based on their team members and the unique circumstances (Kumar & Bhatti, 2020). It has been discovered that the leadership philosophies used have a direct impact on how well employees perform, which in turn affects how the business reaches long-term organizational success (Magombo-Bwanali, 2019).

High-performing agribusiness companies produce enough revenue to support the hiring of both skilled and unskilled people. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020), over 10 million people are employed in the agriculture sector, which contributes 34.5% of Kenya's GDP and is still a major employment in the country. Agricultural businesses with higher profitability tend to have lower employee turnover and more dedicated team members. Elevated levels of product production follow, which makes the owner happy and encourages them to increase their investment in the business. As a result, a high-performing agricultural firm will promptly pay taxes and levies to the government, offer her clients markets for inputs, goods, or services, and promote steady business growth. Effective agricultural businesses boost investor confidence, which results in large capitalization levels for the expansion of business lines that produce highly sought-after goods and services. Investments in performing agricultural enterprises are made by development partners, including donor agencies, non-governmental organizations, and faith-based organizations.

These investments combat poverty by funding capacity-building initiatives that cater to the needs of smallholder farmers, who are essential to the growth of a thriving agricultural sector. The Central Bank of Kenya (2021) reports that more loans are being taken out by Kenya's Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSME) sector to grow their companies. The MSME sector in Kenya took out 915,115 active loans in 2020. Even though Kenya's agriculture industry is very important, it only got 3.7 percent of the budget; the rest went to the trade, real estate, and transportation sectors, which accounted for 66.4 percent. Adopting effective leadership philosophies that empower and inspire workers encourages them to give their all at work, which sustains enterprise performance in the form of higher profits, more sales, enlarged market reach, happy investors, donors, and governments, as well as lower employee attrition.

Jackson (2021) notes that Agricultural Enterprises, despite their importance to several nations, have been seen to either collapse or stagnate, making it challenging for proprietors to carry on offering their services to their customers. Inadequate leadership to offer strategic guidance on how to manage staff so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively and improve overall performance of the business. International Development Association (IDA), 2023 asserts that SMEs contribute to job creation and production and sale of products and services to the Kenyan population. According to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2023), there are 7.4 million micro and small businesses in Kenya that support the country's economy by producing goods and services and creating jobs for its citizens. The inability of an organization to predict its demands for working capital and human resources can result in enterprise collapse (World Bank, 2016). A

lack of leadership competence also makes it harder for the organization to predict its needs. A lot of these businesses are incapable of taking the initiative needed to drive expansion. Research has shown that inadequate leadership at the top and throughout the organization's lifecycle accounts for three of every five business failures. Failure at the top of an organization is caused by a lack of leadership, as Muthimi and Kilika (2018) clarify.

To address the question of why businesses fail, much research on the relationship between leadership styles and organization performance has embraced quantitative methods rather than qualitative ones. It is challenging to adapt the research to the Kenyan context because of the settings in which they were conducted primarily European and American. Investors become demoralized when management adopts improper leadership styles, which also results in low capitalization, low profitability, and low product sales.

Unsuitable leadership styles result in a high employee turnover rate and a company's incapacity to fulfil its financial commitments, including paying employees on time and government taxes and levies, which eventually lead to the company's failure. Poor business performance brought on by ineffective leadership causes important employees to leave, revenue to decline, and the company to close. The objective of this research was to find the manner and rationale behind the influence of Democratic leadership style on the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Path Goal Theory postulates that leaders achieve effectiveness through the leader affecting the paths that lead to the achievement of goals set by employees (Matsui et al., 1981). Achievement expectation affects the employees' motivation for hard work and exemplary achievement of the set targets (Cote, 2017; Nzeneri, 2020). The theory enhances the satisfaction and performance of employees and focuses the nature of the work tasks of employees and how they are motivated to perform their tasks (Northouse, 2019).

Leadership is defined as the process by which leaders inspire, motivate, and direct their employees to achieve their desired goals. The leader develops and communicates the organization's future vision which motivates employees to perform their tasks. Consequently, making them engaged to the organization as they strive to achieve their organizational goal. The Path Goal Theory recognises the fact that leaders set goals and use them to set targets for their employees. The employees then carry out activities to enable them achieve set productivity targets that can be measured to gauge the level of achievement of the goal (Northouse, 2019).

The Path Goal Theory recognises four leadership styles namely: directive, supportive, participative and achievement oriented (Nzeneri, 2020). The Path Goal Leadership Theory has proposed a questionnaire that was modified and adopted to collect data. The data was analysed to show how each leadership style adopted by leaders in a firm influence the performance of their employees. The questionnaire has 20 items which once scored helps a researcher classify the leader into the four broad categories. Their performance was evaluated and compared with the result of their performance. The Path Goal Theory questionnaire was adapted to guide the study. Various scholars have utilised the path goal theory in different contexts. For instance, Rohimin and Hariri (2022) used the theory in the education sector and found that directive and achievement-oriented aspects of the theory are the most widely accepted. Similar studies needed to be conducted in other sectors like the agriculture sector to prove if the findings hold.

Additionally, the theory was used to show how leaders in specific enterprises influence their support staff to accomplish their tasks. Leaders are expected to set compelling goals and prepare the path through which the goals must be accomplished by the team. This technique helps team members deal with bottlenecks as they

appear and motivate the team to carry out their tasks. This theory was used to explain why some enterprises perform better than others and are therefore more successful than others. This was the overarching theory for the study.

Agricultural enterprises have specific goals to carry out to make their businesses become profitable and sustainable. To do this, leaders have the task of figuring out the goals, setting the roadmap through which the goals will be achieved and ensure their support staff are supported and guided to navigate through challenging circumstances. The Path Goal Theory of Leadership was used to guide the study by providing the framework upon which the leadership styles practiced by agricultural enterprises were measured.

The Systems Theory

To find fresh perspectives on life, Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed the Systems Theory in the 1940s and thought it might be used to analyse the intricacies of existence (Lewin et al., 1939). The theory underwent more refinement to enable comprehensive approaches to phenomenon analysis across disciplines. According to the systems theory, corporations are social systems made up of different units that harmoniously link to one another to increase their effectiveness. The Systems Theory of business is concerned with how departments inside a company are arranged to work together for the benefit of the company, and how each component complements the other. Because it interacts with its surroundings, the internal organisation must also adjust to shifting circumstances. As such, businesses need to set up feedback loops that make it simple for them to adjust to changes (Teece, 2018). In this scenario, agricultural businesses are divided into divisions like marketing, finance, human resources, and production, all of which must deal with the environment as suppliers of goods and services. They serve as a market as well for completed goods and services.

The problem with the Systems Theory is that it is very general and could be misleading in a world where specialization is necessary to obtain a competitive advantage. For example, altering product prices may seem like a significant change to draw in more business, but if a larger picture isn't considered, this may not be a feasible answer. The emphasis on the dynamic capabilities of firms has improved the Systems Theory over time. According to the notion of dynamic capacities, an organisation needs to develop the capacity to react quickly and efficiently to both potential opportunities and risks in the business environment (Plaza-Ñbeda et al., 2020). The organization's capabilities play a crucial role in defining its capabilities and guiding the implementation of changes that are necessary to keep competitiveness in the market. Dynamic capabilities examine the tactics and resources that are employed to raise an organization's level of competitiveness. Resources include labour from human beings, machinery, buildings, and intangible goods. The importance of strategy lies in its ability to help companies in deciding when to enter markets. They offer tactics for successfully keeping rivals out of a certain market sector (Teece, 2018). The hypothesis served as an explanation for how agricultural firms operated. The theory was applied to describe how every worker contributes to the business's efficient operation. Each employee's distinct tasks contribute to the company's overall performance (Issa & Kiruthu, 2019).

Democratic Leadership Style and Enterprise Performance

Research conducted worldwide has revealed a favourable association between firm performance and democratic leadership. Dyczkowska and Dyczkowski (2018) discovered a favourable correlation between SME success and democratic leadership in Poland. Democratic leaders consult their staff members before making judgements. In addition to providing leadership, Democratic leaders emphasise the social components of the workgroup by enabling their staff members to use their skills and abilities. Democratic leaders collaborate with support personnel to reward them for their commitment and, rather than criticising

them, engage with them to find solutions to issues. As a result, workers are held extremely responsible for achieving their goals.

Democratic leaders engage their staff in discussions about enterprise projections and anticipated setbacks, which increases staff dedication to their tasks and unleashes their creativity, resulting in workers committed to providing their clients with high-quality goods and services. Democratic leadership improves organisational performance by providing opportunities for support staff to express and implement their creative ideas (Al Khajeh, 2018). Research conducted in Asia revealed a high positive correlation between employee performance and leadership styles in a private Malaysian company (Basit et al., 2017). Using accessible sampling and closed-ended questionnaires, the study concentrated on three leadership philosophies.

An indisputable link between democratic leadership and business performance was found in a study conducted in the United Arab Emirates on the relationship between leadership styles and firm performance (Cherian et al., 2020). Democratic leadership encourages support personnel to take ownership of the processes and put in their best effort to achieve improved performance by giving them the chance to engage and provide their leaders with suggestions and solutions. Because they feel valued, employees who have the chance to contribute to the company's decision-making process are more likely to share their creative ideas.

Similar research conducted in Ghana's non-governmental sector in Africa supports the claim that democratic leadership has an unquestionably favourable impact on support staff members' performance (Akpapere et al., 2019). Employee commitment to their work increases when they participate in decision-making, which improves business performance. When given the chance to express their thoughts and opinions, support staff members at TumaKavi Development Association in Tamale, Northern Region of Ghana, are more engaged and committed to organisational projects, according to their assessment of how leadership styles affect business performance. Depending on the circumstance, a leader's style can have a beneficial or adverse impact on an organization's performance. They claim that depending on the circumstances, adopting an autocratic or laissez-faire leadership style can aid in achieving goals. Similarly, in their study on the effect of democratic leadership on the success of family-owned firms in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Akonkwa et al. (2022) found a high positive correlation between participative leadership and the performance of enterprises. Analogous investigations concerning the influence of leadership philosophies on Eritrean school achievement revealed a robustly affirmative correlation between democratic leadership and academic success (Tedla & Redda, 2021). Analogous research conducted in Eritrea to investigate the influence of school principals' leadership styles on academic performance revealed that democratic leadership has a favorable effect on school performance (Weller et al., 2020).

Comparable studies in Kenya produced different findings. For example, Kariuki and Wachira (2017) concluded that financial organizations, where decisions need to be made quickly, are not the right places to apply democratic leadership styles. Should the democratic leadership's requirement for time to consult precede decision-making be implemented in circumstances where time is of the essence, money would be lost. However, Bwonya et al. (2020) discovered that democratic leadership had a favourable impact on Kenyan businesses' performance. Studies are necessary to determine which of these contradictory findings holds true in different contexts.

Democratic leadership has advantages, but it also has drawbacks. For example, it takes a lot longer to complete tasks, which makes it ineffective. Democratic executives should therefore strive to assemble small, initiative-taking teams of employees that can swiftly come to an agreement and use their time effectively. According to Fiaz et al. (2017), small businesses that depend heavily on efficiency and time for survival in highly competitive markets are well-suited for democratic leadership.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a practical approach. The best research methods ought to be mixed to answer the study's objectives and inquiries. The pragmatic approach provides the best answer to research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The study blended quantitative and qualitative methodologies because the research subject might be addressed in diverse ways. An explanatory sequential approach using mixed approaches was used. Quantitative data was collected and analysed to evaluate the impact of Democratic Leadership Style on the performance of Kenyan agricultural firms.

To show how Democratic Leadership Style affects the Performance of Agricultural Enterprises in Kenya, qualitative perspectives were obtained. To find the reasoning behind the acts of the support workers, qualitative data was collected and analysed based on the leadership style selected by their senior leadership. The outcomes of the quantitative investigation were explained and interpreted using qualitative data. The application of qualitative research enabled a comprehensive explanation of the outcomes.

Research Design and Approach

Because it produces results from the stratified random sample that are conclusive and relevant to the target audience, the cross-sectional survey method was selected. Studies that employ cross-sectional surveys are conducted to gather data from subjects at a specific time to address a research question (Sekaran, 2003). Since this study was conducted over a four-week period and the data collected was meant for academic research, the cross-sectional survey approach was the most suitable. Longitudinal studies that collect data over a longer period at various intervals would not be suited for this inquiry due to budgetary and scheduling constraints (Sekaran, 2003).

Statistical modelling was employed in conjunction with a straightforward variable description to figure out the statistical relationships between the variables in this instance (Saunders et al., 2016). To serve as the primary research tool, a questionnaire with closed-ended questions was created. The data was collected using a stratified sample of CEOs and staff members who represented each stratified sample of Kenyan agricultural firms.

A small sample of supervisors and support staff members were specifically chosen to take part in in-depth interviews and a qualitatively focused group discussion following the discovery that Democratic Leadership Style favourably improves the performance of agricultural operations via means of targeted group discussions and in-depth interviews. Nvivo 14 was the programme used to analyse the qualitative data. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), the data was coded, grouped into themes, and entered pre-made forms to facilitate interpretation. The results were used to clarify how Kenyan agricultural enterprises' performance was affected by democratic leadership style.

Target Population and Sample Size

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the population in a scientific study is the entire set of individuals or elements that the researcher wants to consider while making findings. Each element should share at least one characteristic with the others. The study's target group consisted of 525 leaders and their employees from 105 agricultural firms taking part in post-harvest activities in Western, Upper Eastern, and Lower Eastern Kenya under the Bountifield International Mavuno Bora Programme.

Since it was expected that the data would correctly reflect the opinions of each member of each agricultural firm and that the data would stand for entire organisations, probability sampling techniques were employed in the study (Taherdoost, 2017). The study's bias was lessened in this way. A sample of 222 workers and

their supervisors was taken for the quantitative data. We gathered qualitative information from forty managers and staff members. The managers and support staff of farming enterprises providing post-harvest services to farmers in the ten selected Kenyan counties were the only participants in the study. The leaders and support staff who work for Kenya's agricultural enterprises were the unit of observation, while the agricultural firms themselves were the unit of analysis (Taherdoost, 2017).

The non-probability sampling method needs to be used to pick a small sample to apply the qualitative approach to interpret the responses from the supervisors and their support staff in the agricultural operations. A purposeful sampling approach was applied. Through deliberate sampling, the greatest cases that produce the best data for the study are sought after. Maximum variation sampling was used to sample a range of leaders and support staff with differing opinions on the leadership philosophies used in the agricultural sector (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Method and Procedures

Information was collected within the time range approved by NACOSTI, the National Commission for Science and Technology Innovation. To get the relevant data needed to fulfil the study's objectives, careful and thorough data gathering was used (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The respondents and study participants were asked to provide written consent. The management of pertinent agricultural firms also signed a consent form allowing the study to be carried out at their premises. In this approach, participants and respondents found the bravery to take part in the survey. A brief letter from the researcher summarising the goals of the study was sent with the questionnaire. The questionnaires were given to the respondents in hard copy, and they had a minimum of one day to finish them before they were collected. Technology-savvy respondents filled out the online forms and uploaded them as Google Forms. By handing out surveys and outlining the goal of the study, the researcher and research assistants were able to gain the respondents' support. Each respondent had ample time to do the questionnaire on their own. When the respondents were given the opportunity to react whatever they thought fit, they had time to think through the process. The accuracy of the information gathered was verified.

Eight executives and staff members took part in four targeted group conversations using guiding questions to collect qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Using a structured set of questions centred around three topics, a facilitator led the focused group discussions. Among the themes are the enterprise's performance, capacity building, and leadership style. The primary discussion topics brought up by the participants were recorded and transcribed to figure out the major themes. Each focused group discussion lasted around sixty minutes.

Participants selected from certain agricultural firms took part in eight key informant interviews. The facilitator used an interview schedule having leading questions to elicit data that addressed the study issue. The interviews were scheduled ahead of schedule to guarantee that participants had enough time to take part in the research. It took at least 30 minutes for each key informant interview.

Measurement of Leadership Styles and Performance of Agricultural Enterprises

Democratic leadership style was the independent variable. It was measured by evaluating the five parameters using five questions that confirm the existence of Democratic leadership style in the management of the enterprise. The five questions included: ability of the supervisor to inspire innovation and team spirit, ability of the leader to seek the views of staff, ability of the leader to allow teams to start and remain in operation, whether the leader empowers talent and competency or whether the leader involves teams in target setting (Akonkwa et al., 2022). Agricultural Enterprise Performance was the dependent variable. The evaluation of agricultural enterprise performance encompassed both financial and non-

financial indicators.

The first set of statements considered the financial performance. The financial parameters exhibited a mean value of 2.5575. The highest mean for financial parameters was recorded for enterprise attraction of new customers at 3.88 followed by enterprise profits increase at 3.59 asset increment at 3.59. Introduction of new products scored a mean of 3.44 followed by increased sales at 3.06, followed by reduction of the cost of business at 2.86 followed by better management of expenses at 2.83. The lowest mean was recorded for enterprise capital increment at 2.78. Introduction of new products had the highest standard deviation (1.586), while enterprise assets increment had the lowest standard deviation (0.656). Considering the mean score is 3.25 which is higher than 2.5, the results indicate that a good number of agricultural enterprises surveyed were performing above average.

The second set considered non-financial parameter of agricultural enterprise performance. Respondents were requested to fill the questionnaire on the first part of the statements which represented financial performance parameters of agricultural enterprise performance. Eight statements were used to evaluate the financial performance parameters of agricultural enterprise performance. Non-financial parameters of measuring agricultural enterprise performance generated four means with job satisfaction among employees attaining the highest mean of 4.07 followed by owner satisfaction at 3.82, customer satisfaction at 3.78 and employee staff turnover attaining the lowest mean of 2.75. The average mean for the four parameters was 3.605. Staff turnover had the highest standard deviation, while employee job satisfaction had the lowest standard deviation.

The results indicate that non-financial parameters had a higher mean score compared to the one for financial parameters. This means that the employees of the agricultural enterprises surveyed identified more with non-financial attributes compared to the financial attributes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Test of Hypothesis

The hypothesis H_{03} stated that democratic leadership style does not influence the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya. To find the overall impact of democratic leadership style on the performance of agricultural firms in Kenya, the factors that make up democratic leadership style were compiled and put through a linear regression analysis.

The following regression equation was used to illustrate the relationship.

$$AEP = \beta_0 + \beta_3 DL_3 + \epsilon$$

where AEP=performance of agricultural enterprises, DL_3 = democratic leadership style ϵ is the standard error.

To evaluate the hypothesis the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya was regressed on democratic leadership style. The model results were summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Influence of Democratic Leadership Style on the Performance of Agricultural Enterprises in Kenya

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.222a	0.049	0.044	12.58		

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1416.842	1	1416.842	8.952	.003b
	Residual	27221.801	172	158.266		
	Total	28638.643	173			
a. Dependent Variable: Enterprise Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Democratic Leadership						
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	34.073	2.355		14.47	0.001
	Democratic Leadership	0.516	0.172	0.222	2.992	0.001

With a R value of 0.222 and an R2 of 0.049, Table 1’s results show the statistically significant impact of democratic leadership style on Kenyan agricultural firms’ performance ($p < 0.003$). The study’s conclusions show that there is a small but beneficial relationship between agricultural firm success and democratic leadership style. A difference in democratic leadership style only accounts for 4.9% of the variance in agricultural firm performance, according to the R-squared value of 0.049. Other factors not considered in this study will account for the remaining 95.1%.

The percentage of agricultural enterprise performance that could be explained by a democratic leadership style was statistically significant ($F = 8.952$, $p = 0.003 < 0.05$). The p-value of 0.003, which was found, is below the significant level of 0.05. Considering the results, H03 is thus not endorsed. As such, the null hypothesis was rejected by the investigation. The results of the study verify that democratic leadership and the success of Kenyan agricultural firms are positively correlated.

An analysis of multiple linear regression was created using the coefficients listed in Table 1. The model obtained from the stepwise regression modelling might resemble this when the constant term and beta values were replaced:

$$AEP = 34.073 + 0.222DL_3 + 2.355 \dots \dots \dots (iii)$$

where AEP=performance of agricultural enterprises, DL_3 = democratic leadership style ϵ is the standard error.

The positive correlation of democratic leadership style says that, as shown in Table 1, a unit change in this style is linked to a comparable gain in agricultural enterprise performance of 0.222. The results confirm the research conducted by Cherian et al. (2020), which established a robust and definitive correlation between democratic leadership styles and company success in the United Arab Emirates.

The results are consistent with those of Dyczkowska and Dyczkowski (2018), who discovered a favourable relationship between Democratic leadership and SMEs’ performance in their Polish study. In a similar vein, Basit et al. (2017) discovered a robustly positive correlation between democratic leadership and worker performance in a Malaysian private company. According to Cherian et al. (2020), there is a positive correlation between the performance of enterprises in the United Arab Emirates and democratic leadership. Democratic leadership encourages support workers to take ownership of the processes and put in their best effort to achieve improved performance by giving them the chance to engage and offer suggestions and

responses to their leaders. Because they feel valued, employees who have the chance to contribute to the company's decision-making process are more likely to share their creative ideas.

The results of this study are consistent with those of Akparep et al. (2019). They discovered an unquestionably favourable correlation between democratic leadership and support staff performance in their study of Ghana's non-governmental sector. When workers are involved in decision-making, they become more committed to their work, which improves task performance and boosts business performance. When given the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with the organization's management, support staff members feel inspired and become more invested in the projects undertaken by the organisation.

Similarly, in their study on the effect of democratic leadership on the success of family-owned firms in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Akonkwa et al. (2022) found a high positive correlation between participative leadership and the performance of enterprises. Analogous investigations concerning the influence of leadership philosophies on Eritrean school achievement revealed a robustly affirmative correlation between democratic leadership and academic success (Tedla & Redda, 2021). Analogous research conducted in Eritrea to investigate the influence of school principals' leadership styles on academic performance revealed that democratic leadership has a favourable effect on school performance (Weller et al., 2020). According to research conducted in Kenya by Bwonya et al. (2020), democratic leadership has a favourable impact on businesses' performance.

On the other hand, similar research conducted in Kenya yielded different results. For example, Kariuki and Wachira (2017) discovered that financial firms in Kenya, where prompt judgements are needed, should not apply democratic leadership styles. If the democratic leadership's requirement for time for consultation before decisions is implemented in circumstances where time is of the essence, income would be lost.

The following topics were produced by the qualitative study data that aimed to figure out why democratic leaders affect an enterprise's performance. Participants from democratically led agricultural businesses noted that employees are initiative-taking when they are included in the decision-making process of target setting and business operations. One participant talked about how she felt really valued for her advice on which business line to launch and how it even helped the company attract new customers. Others conveyed their happiness with their leaders' consultation process before selecting how to conduct tasks.

Conversely, as many participants have noted, leaders who never allow their followers to voice their opinions alienate them, which demotivates their workforce and causes the company to perform poorly. The outcomes align with the discoveries made by Cherian et al. (2020). They found an unbreakable link between democratic leadership and business performance in their study on the relationship between leadership styles and firm performance in the United Arab Emirates. Democratic leaders inspire support staff members to take ownership of the processes and, as a result, put in their best effort to generate better results by giving them the opportunity to take part and give ideas and thoughts to their leaders.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this research was to look at how democratic leadership affects Kenyan agricultural firms' performance. The ability of the leader to involve respondents in sales projections and forecast potential setbacks for their business received the highest mean score (2.68) among the statements, according to the results. This was followed by the leader's ability to mentor team members by enabling them to put their skills and abilities into practice (2.65). The supervisor received a score of 2.61 for keeping teamwork and a score of 2.37 for consistently seeking out different points of view. The supervisor's capacity to foster creativity and collaboration received the lowest mean score (2.03). The overall mean screen score for the democratic leadership style was (2.47), with a mean standard deviation of 1.308. Among the four leadership styles assessed, democratic leadership had the least beneficial impact on the performance of Kenyan

agricultural firms, as shown by the lowest positive mean score.

The findings from the descriptive statistics are also supported by the results from inferential statistics, which produced an R value of 0.222 for democratic leadership styles. Democratic leaders provide opportunities for support personnel to engage and provide their leaders with proposals and responses. As a result, opportunities for support personnel to provide their ideas inspire them to put in their best effort and perform better. Employees who actively take part in the decision-making process of agricultural enterprises feel valued, which encourages them to implement their innovative ideas.

The success of Kenyan agricultural firms and democratic leadership were found to have a weak positive association ($R^2=0.049$, $F=8.952$, $p=0.003<0.05$) according to inferential statistics results. As a result, the null hypothesis—which held that the performance of agricultural firms is unaffected by democratic leadership style—was rejected.

The results confirm that including employees in the decision-making process facilitates their buy-in. Team members are encouraged to perform to the best of their abilities when they engage in decisions pertaining to the strategic operations of the agricultural organization. Giving team members the chance to display their skills boosts productivity at the corporate level, which improves company performance.

Democratic leadership was found to have a marginally positive impact on Kenyan agricultural firms' performance. However, democratic leadership style had a significant impact when capacity development was included. As a result, it is advised that management of agricultural enterprises embrace a democratic leadership style while making sure that staff members are consistently trained as leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Agricultural enterprises in Kenya, like other businesses, engage employees to deliver their products and services. Considering different leadership styles have been found to influence the performance of the enterprises to distinct levels, it is recommended that a mix of the leadership styles be adopted for optimal performance.

Considering democratic leadership style was found to exert a weak positive influence on the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya, it is recommended that other leadership styles be adopted to enhance enterprise performance.

Considering there are other factors that contribute to the performance of agricultural enterprises even when democratic leadership is in play, the study recommends that similar studies be conducted to figure out the other factors accounting for the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya. Consequently, achieved results from those studies will guarantee that all the factors that influence the performance of agricultural enterprises in Kenya will have been adequately considered. The study recommends that similar studies focus on other sectors and geographies to figure out if the findings hold. Similar studies using mixed methods approach can be adopted to confirm the validity of the results.

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