

# The Mediating Influence of Leadership Style within the Nexus of Organizational Agility and Performance Outcomes in Public Universities in Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Public universities in Kenya have been operating in an environment that has been changing over the past few years, and the numerous uncertainties have made survival difficult. Ineffectiveness and inefficiencies in the public universities, low global ranking of public universities, low research output and the weak university-industry partnerships due to the closed system nature of public universities and other internal and external factors have continued to affect university performance. The application of the concept of organizational agility may be viewed as a panacea to addressing the above pertinent issues and bring the public universities to a higher level of performance in uncertain changing environment. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the mediating influence of leadership style within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya. The research is anchored on Dynamic Capability theory, Resource based view theory and Learning organization theory. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to measure both quantitative and qualitative data, using descriptive and explanatory research methodologies for empirical analysis. Content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data, and the results presented in accordance with patterns and themes. The target population was the 31 fully fledged public universities in Kenya out of which 10 were sampled systematically from best to worst ranked institution based on January 2023 web metrics global university ranking scale. The study targeted 220 respondents comprising of Deputy Vice Chancellors, Deans of schools and faculty, academic department heads and key senior staff in administration. Out of this, only 207 returned the questionnaire accounting for 94.1% success rate. Due to the characteristics of the respondents and the goal of the investigation, a proportionate random sample technique was employed to choose the respondents for the study. A drop-and-pick methodology was used to collect data by trained research assistants. The questionnaire was subjected to both validity and reliability tests by carrying out a pilot test on different group from the study group but with similar characteristics and use of SPSS version 27 to process the data. Using a multiple regression analysis approach, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data in accordance with the specific research objectives and hypotheses. Results from quantitative data analysis were presented using figures and tables while qualitative data was analyzed based on common themes and presented in narrative form. The findings of the study established that leadership style fully mediated effect on relationship between organizational agility and university performance outcomes. These findings were found useful in management of public universities in the face of uncertainties. Furthermore, these findings are expected to provide a framework for enhancing performance outcomes of public universities in the midst of adverse environmental circumstances by forming appropriate policies and strategies through application of appropriate leadership styles.

**Key words-** Organizational agility, Leadership style, University performance

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The current dynamic environment, characterized by intense competitive forces has made many organizations all over the world to develop abilities to respond swiftly and effectively to the changes in a way that sustain their performance. This is a necessity to organization leadership that pursues success compared to those found

floundering. Currently, the speed at which organizations are compelled to change is enormous and so one way to consider and address environment turbulence by managers is by excelling in performance of their products or services (Da Gama, 2011). Organizations including universities need to evaluate their environment and the ways in which they practice leadership style that facilitates the performance outcomes of their institutions. (Bruni, Cassia and Magno, 2017).

Globally, university education has continued to play a crucial role in social and economic growth by supplying skilled manpower and disseminating information through research. The twenty first century has been declared knowledge era century by most universities in the world (Wasike & Ogollah, 2014). Thus, through university education many individuals have enabled development of their capabilities and skills to the highest potential level (Okioga, Onsongo, & Nyaboga, 2012). However, in Africa, improving university performance has continually proven to be a difficult and elusive task (Odhiambo, 2011).

It has been increasingly challenging for Kenya's public universities to survive in the recent years due to a number of uncertainties in their operating environment. The unprecedented challenges such as ineffective internal processes leading to reduced enrolment self - sponsored students who form a significant portion of population in the public universities, low global ranking of public universities due to reduced research uptake, weak university-industry partnerships due to the closed system nature of public universities and low government capitation slow pace for income generating activities have continued to affect university performance over time bringing the university leadership back to the drawing boards. This raises the issue of how organizational agility might be used as a panacea to addressing these pertinent issues and bring the public universities to a higher level of performance in uncertain changing environment.

However, the organization agility concept alone may not be a complete solution to problem facing public universities without considering other mediating and moderating factors to this relationship. In this study the type of leadership style in existence provided the mediating effect while the institution environment provided the moderating effect to the study.

### **Organizational Agility**

Iacocca Research Institute developed agility as a strategy for firms in the 21st century to successfully adjust to ambiguous changes in the environment in 1991 (Moubed & Rafi, 2022). Later, a large number of scholars proposed various frameworks and dimensions for organizational agility (Sarlak, Delangizan, & Real 2016). Others have linked organizational agility to a concept of organizational strategic thinking that, at the time of realization, is a component of strategic management. Strategic thinking, monitoring and decision making functions have been found as key management activities that play a fundamental role in implementation of organizational agility in an organization (Khoshlahn & Ardabili, 2016; Williams, Lawler, & Worley, 2014; Alzoubi, Al-Otoun, & Albatainh, 2011).

It can be argued that the idea of organizational agility derives from the idea of strategic thinking by using perspectives from the model of 'thinking in time' by organizations' leadership, as attributed by Liedtka (1998), and the uncertain change occurring in the environment and affecting universities all over the world. According to Mbaya (2021), strategic thinking entails generating fresh concepts and acting on potential solutions that will increase performance. Based on this thoughts, organizational agility is therefore a key constructs for an organization facing challenges of performance in uncertain changing environment. Study done by Salih and Alnaji (2014) on performance of insurance companies in Jordan showed that agility and strategic thinking greatly influenced in a positive manner the performance of those organizations. Weiner (2020) asserts that organizational leaders must adopt an innovative and strategic thinking mindset with zeal to exploit change and take advantage of arising opportunities in the environment. A conceptual framework that describes the real meaning of agility in an organization as well as how the many agility dimensions interact is currently lacking, according to Walter (2020).

Since it describes how businesses may stay competitive in a certain business environment, organizational agility is a complicated and multifaceted term that presents a potential prospect (Harraf & Wanasika, 2015; Rima & Mindaugus, 2018). Different academics have characterized this idea of agility in different ways. Li &

Holsapple (2018) defines agility as a measure of responsiveness to external stimuli giving an organization an overall flexibility and adaptability in pursuit of achievement of its planned goals and future survival. Organizational agility is defined by Hamad & Yozgat (2017) as the ability of an organization to proactively recognize and respond swiftly and effectively to abrupt and unpredictable changes in the business environment.

According to Nafei (2016), agility is an organization's capacity to realize its goals and plans through better understanding of its people resource, the creation of new products, and overall organization development in a quickly changing environment. Alamro, Hosseini, and Farooq (2019), asserts that agility is the capacity of an organization to adapt and change in response to environmental changes. Rima & Mindaugas (2018), defines organizational agility as the capacity to identify sudden changes in the environment and adapt correctly, quickly, and efficiently by repurposing internal resources, giving the organization an improved performance. Earlier definitions of agility focused on specific functional areas of the organization because most researchers concentrated on a specific sector of the business, particularly the manufacturing sector where the roots of agility originated with the belief that this enhanced the performance and abilities of the business organizations (Panda & Rath, 2018). This contrasts with the above definitions of agility, which provide an overall picture of the entire enterprise.

### **Mediating influence of Leadership Style**

Since the dawn of civilization, the study of leaders and their leadership philosophies has attracted considerable attention and is today a topic of ongoing research. Kouzes & Posner (2007) described leadership as a dynamic process in which leaders can inspire followers to take extraordinary actions through engagements. Leaders may engage in these behaviors by serving as role models, communicating their vision, encouraging people to take action, and disclosing process obstacles. Day and Leithwood (2015) described leadership style as the motivation behind any strategy that is implemented and a description of how it will function in the short- and long-term. These include activities like developing the organization's vision, finding individuals to help realize it, setting goals and objectives, and eventually putting up a thorough action plan with quantifiable criteria. However, due to the unpredictability of the dynamic environment in which these firms operate, a particular distinctive leadership style that gives an organization a competitive edge over others has remained a significant conundrum (Varouchas, Sicilia, and Alonzo, 2018; Azma, 2010).

Although there is a wealth of literature on leadership, many organizations still struggle to understand what it means, particularly in light of how important leadership is to the success of institutions like universities (Jalaliyoon & Taherdoost, 2012). Given the current state of the literature and previous conceptualizations of the construct, it appears to be unclear how to look for evidence of the existence of a single leadership style inside organizational systems (Muthimi & Kilika, 2018). There are still important issues that need to be resolved, like: Is a leadership style a person? Is it an office or a position? Where in a university can we find it? What role does it play in the university system? How can we hold it responsible for the outcomes of the organization? How can we relate it to a university's performance in the face of ambiguous operational environment changes?

In conclusion, there is a need for a concerted effort in strategic management to broaden the understanding of the construct of leadership as applied in organizational systems by incorporating key leadership styles during period of uncertainties. This is because there are still unanswered questions about what constitutes an appropriate leadership style, where to trace it, and how to link it to the success or failure of an organization undergoing unprecedented changes. Different academics have addressed these gaps in different ways. For instance, Pasmore's (2014) work fills in this vacuum by emphasizing leadership development strategy in order to inject a conceptualization that addresses the unresolved issues around how to identify the best leadership style for a company during an uncertain period of environmental change. Others have responded by creating enduring leadership traits to fill the gap quickly and effectively while maintaining the competitiveness and survival of their organizations (Mastrangelo, Eddy, & Lorenzet, 2014; Shahbazi & Korejan, 2016).

Therefore, to enable organization leadership thrive successfully in uncertain circumstances and ensure business continuity, organizational leaders must adhere to develop leadership styles in view of the unexpected changes

in the environment. However, in order to successfully combat the ongoing emergence of new problems, organizational leaders need to accumulate new knowledge, such as organizational agility principles that they can investigate and use to generate or improve competencies (Kumar & Kumar, 2017). However, due to the authority it wields, management's leadership style is essential to the company's performance in order to achieve the efficacy of leadership in an organization. In order to measure three different leadership styles, democratic, laissez-faire, and autocratic leadership styles will be examined in this study. Their mediating influence within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities is a key area of interest.

The three leadership types have been examined in various literary studies from various angles. The autocratic leadership style is the first kind of leadership style. Iqbal, Anwar, and Haider (2015) assert that in an authoritarian leadership style, plans and policies are formed independently from the group and only the leaders provide commands that are unexplained. According to Chukwusa (2018), an authoritarian leadership style discourages individuals of an organization from using their creative ideas to address challenges. He goes on to say that in order to effectively apply this style of leadership in managing institutions of higher learning, leaders should learn to practice restraint. Because of this, any firm must have an effective leadership style to survive in today's unstable settings. According to Joana and Tomasz (2018), a company is difficult to thrive in the modern market if it does not view human capital as a key success component.

According to Malos (2012), democratic leaders seek consensus by speaking with their subordinates before making important choices, in contrast to authoritarian leaders who act on their own. They also encourage commitment from subordinates, which makes these empowered workers feel more accountable for achieving corporate objectives (Inandi, Uzun, and Yesil, 2016). These studies shows that while in autocratic leadership, the power is vested in the leader within a centralized decision making, in democratic leadership, the power is vested in the team. Cheah (2018) argue that autocratic leadership emphasizes on punishment and rewards with little influence on goals and objectives setting by the subordinates. In this leadership style, the decisions and controls are centralized and made person to person with stress on a top-down communication model. Other studies show that autocratic leadership has little influence on job performance and all authority emanates from the leader and ends with him or her by monopolizing the decision making process without taking interests of the employees into consideration (Akor,2014).

Democratic leadership is the second category of leadership style. Alfafchi (2017), asserts that democratic leadership style depicts paying attention with care to the needs of employees through good work relationship. Democratic leadership was conceptualized in 1960's by White and Lippitt and emphasized encouragement of group involvement in decision making process. This style of leadership also enhances a participation approach with a caring consideration for subordinate staff. Bass (1990) postulated that democratic leadership is characterized by a sense of responsibility and more attachment to followers. According to Lawler (1986), this leadership style enhances increased autonomy of employees with a sense of information sharing and power sharing. Democratic leadership gives employees the confidence in carrying out duties, make changes and enhance creativity (Raupu, Maharani and Mahmud, 2021).

Democratic leadership, according to Bhatti, Maitla, and Shaikh (2012), empowers the leader to make the ultimate decision after inviting the other team members to contribute to the decision-making process. The decisions made are within teams in democratic leadership with each member having equal inputs. This increases job satisfaction among the employees to exercise their creativity and innovative mindset hence developing their skills by feeling in control of their own destiny. Alfafchi (2017) postulates that democratic leadership boost motivation of subordinates by involving them in consultative opinions during planning, setting goals and policies and thus enhance communication and loyalty creation. Such members' opinion is key to organizational success and leaders in organization should recognize these members across the multiple disciplines. In addition, democratic leadership style promotes teamwork, collaboration and respect for each other's expertise in solving complex problems and challenges (Jones and Rudd, 2008).

Laissez-faire leadership is the third type of leadership. The laissez-faire style of leadership allows for complete freedom for all employees with no specific method of achieving goals, despite the contingency theory's assertion that there is no best style of leadership that is applicable in all situations as this depends on the circumstances at hand within the organization (Bhatti, Maitla, and Shaikh, 2012). Laissez-faire leadership,

according to Sharma, Kumar, and Keshorjit (2013), offers little to no direction. By providing them the opportunity to set their own objectives, make independent choices, and resolve issues, this leadership style gives employees as much independence as possible.

Numerous studies in the literature demonstrate that laissez-faire leaders put off making decisions, postpone taking action by shunning their duties, and decline to exercise the necessary authority that comes with their most important tasks (Avolio, 2011; Bass and Bass, 2008). According to Yukl (2010), these leaders avoid dealing with work related problems by ignoring employees needs and disorganized when dealing with matters of priorities. This leadership style is characterized by avoidance and in-action of key decisions leading to problems in the organization (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2008). Since it fails to give the necessary resources, such as information and answers to difficult work assignments, laissez-faire leadership style is not only unsuccessful in organization management but also damaging (Chen, He, and Wung, 2018). According to Robert and Vandenberghe (2021), workers who have stronger relational self-concepts are more likely to be negatively impacted by laissez-faire leadership since such leaders fail to foster cohesion among their workgroups, which lowers their contributions to goals. From these foregoing discussions, it is clear that appropriate leadership style is paramount to improved performance of public universities in Kenya.

### **Performance of Public Universities in Kenya**

Universities in Kenya significantly contribute to the growth of the country's economy by giving many individuals access to higher education and job possibilities in both the formal and informal sectors (Muraguri, 2017). These institutions of higher learning also provide a leading edge in research work that results in innovations hence contributing to the successful attainment of the country's vision 2030 (Ayuya, Awino, Machuki, & Wainaina, 2017). Since independence, there have been 62 universities established in Kenya, including private universities, constituent colleges, and organizations with official temporary letter of interim authority. Out of these, 31 are fully fledged public universities. The leadership in these institutions has continued to fight for survival with the limited resources available despite the fact that demand for higher education in Kenya has grown significantly over the years. This is due to a number of challenges, including, among others, ineffectiveness and inefficiencies due to inadequate enrolment of self-sponsored students, lack of proper service charters and lack of certification to international standards such as ISO, weak university-industry partnerships, a low level of research activity and a low global ranking, This calls for application of an appropriate leadership style to help sail through these challenges with ease in order to attain a performance level that may lead to success of these universities.

Several scholars in organizational studies have made various efforts to operationalize the measures of university performance in many ways. Kilika (2012) operationalized it in terms of innovation, knowledge creation, corporate reputation, and ability to adapt to change (agility) and university industry collaboration as a mediating variable (Kilika, K'Obonyo, Ogutu, & Munyoki, 2016). Muraguri (2017) operationalized it in terms of teaching effectiveness assessed by student enrollment levels, teaching resources and the number of new academic programs, community outreach assessed by university reputation, public-private partnerships, community service and linkages, and finally research uptake assessed by the level of university ranking, innovation, knowledge dissemination and the amount of research grants won. Muthimi, Kilika, and Kinyua (2021) evaluated the performance of universities in three areas: research uptake (measured by innovation, publications, and dissemination), community outreach (measured by university-industry collaboration, corporate social responsibility, and civic engagement) and Teaching quality evaluated by curriculum reviews and academic audits. The current study focuses on the mediating influence of leadership style on the nexus between organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya.

### **Statement of the problem**

Even though universities in Kenya play an increasingly significant role in delivering the country's economic and social development in order to realize Vision 2030, these institutions particularly public universities are now dealing with new issues as a result of shifting environmental conditions that endanger their sustainability (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2014; Muthimi, Kilika and Kinyua, 2021). Additionally, improving the performance of Kenya's public universities has consistently shown to be a difficult and illusive endeavor (Odhiambo, 2011;

Okioga, 2012 & Muraguri, 2017). These universities have been less agile compared to their industrial counterparts due to being complacent in their achievements and showing very few initiatives towards change over the years in existence (Shalini & Suresh, 2020).

To survive under this Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous environmental circumstances, public universities in Kenya need to develop appropriate strategies that will enable their leadership explore and exploit potential opportunities in the environment faster than their rivals to make them more agile, stable and competitive. This brings out consideration of the idea of organizational agility as a possible determinant of performance for these universities in this era of unpredictable environment.

Although there has been little written about organizational agility at the conceptual and theoretical levels, the situation is still worse at the empirical level, particularly in the business and service sectors where the concept is still new and relatively young in its development and conceptualization (Shalini & Suresh, 2020). Walter (2020) found that studies on organizational agility have concentrated more on Asian and European markets compared to African nations and focused more on the manufacturing and IT software industries at 79%. For example, in Kenya agility researches are still scanty at 3% compared to Asia at 22%, Indian markets at 13%, UK markets (8%), US markets (5%) and 61% of studies with no indication of a specific region of concentration (Menon & Suresh, 2020).

Research has also shown that studies on agility have centered on organization development (19%), agility enablers (15%), organizational agility measurement (15%) and organizational agility in general (12%) with little research on mediating influence of leadership style on nexus of organizational agility and performance (Sangari & Razmi, 2015). Furthermore, globally agility researches on the service and business sector including the institutes of higher learning such as the universities still remains under emphasized at 3% (Sangari & Razmi, 2015; Malik, Sarwar, & Orr, 2021; Shalini & Suresh, 2020; Walter, 2020). This results in a gap that this study aims to remedy.

Various scholars in the field of strategic management have used other independent variables besides organizational agility in predicting university performance from a wider perspective with varying conceptual and contextual features. A few of these studies includes Inspirational motivation (Muthimi, Kilika and Kinyua, 2021), employee empowerment (Ibua, 2017), curriculum orientation (Ngala, 2018) and dimensions of strategic intent (Muraguri, 2017). However, these studies do not address how universities might improve on their performance in light of the changing uncertain environmental circumstance that has affected them.

In light of the aforementioned ideas and the inclusion of mediating influence of appropriate leadership style, the current work is believed to provide a substantial contribution to both general and strategic management research. By concentrating on the construct of organizational agility, which has gotten minimal attention in both theoretical and empirical literature, the study will fill many gaps in the literature that deserve scholarly attention in order to explain and assess the strength of the relationship between organizational agility and performance of public universities in Kenya, It is on this strength that this study focuses on the mediating influence of leadership styles within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya.

### **Study objective**

To evaluate the mediating influence of leadership style within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya.

### **Research hypothesis**

The following research hypotheses was tested in accordance with the above specific objective,

Leadership style has no mediating influence within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter reviews the research on numerous organizational agility indicators and how they related to academic achievement at universities. The review looked at the underlying theories of the research as well as the empirical results of related studies that provided a foundation for the current examination on mediating influence of leadership style on the nexus between organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya. The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that show how the study's conceptualization of the study variables are interconnected.

### Theoretical literature review

The pertinent theories that supported the study's constructs was covered in this section of the study. These included the Resource Based View (RBV) and Learning Organization Theory. A theory, according to Torraco (2016) and Post, Gatrell, & Prescott (2020), is a set of guiding principles that explains a phenomenon or how it is thought to operate.

### Resource Based View Theory

In 1959, Penrose put forth the Resource Based View (RBV) hypothesis, which emphasized the importance of internal organizational resources in enhancing overall performance. Later, Wernerfelt and Rumelt (1984), who examined an organization from the perspective of its vital resources, developed this theory and named it Resource Based View (RBV), which provides an organization with a long-lasting competitive edge. Later, Barney (1991) asserted that an organization doesn't achieve sustainable performance by merely acquiring resources, but rather by combining and effectively utilizing its organizational resources in a way that adds unique value and is challenging for competitors to copy because of their value, rarity, immutability, and non-substitutable nature.

Hamel and Prahalad (1990) termed RBV a core competency for the organization and referred it as an organization capability. On the other side, Corner (1991) argues that RBV is a development of the theory of the firm and a source of competitive advantage for organizations. According to Madhani (2010), RBV adopts a 'inside-out' perspective on why businesses win or fail in the market and views resources and capabilities as static. Since then, the RBV theory has predominantly been used by various strategic management and human resource scholars in their research (Muchemi, 2014; Kinyua, 2015; Kiiru (2015).

The early works of behavioural management theorists served as the inspiration for Resource Based View (RBV) theory. For example, Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger during the Hawthorne experiments in the year 1927 to 1932 addressed the importance of human behaviour dimensions at workplace by highlighting the shortcomings of the original neo-classical management theory. Later, studies on human motivations by Abraham Maslow in 1948 and Douglas McGregor in the 1960's on theory X and theory Y managers in an organization contributed heavily to the concept of the significance of employees as a strategic and valuable resource at workplace.

According to proponents of the RBV hypothesis, organizations are heterogeneous because they have resources that are also diverse. These resources must be VRIN—valuable, rare, unchangeable or immutable, and not-substitutable. Resources are referred to as immutable if they are either legally protected by trademarks, patents, or copyrights or are extremely difficult to copy as a result of unique features established by the organization. Resources are valuable or rare when they are relatively high cost or quality in acquiring them, such as professional, specialized, and experienced workforce in an organization. When competitors are unable to get substitute resources that can deliver the same advantages as the original resource, the latter is said to as non-substitutable. Consequently, the emphasis is on the organization's leadership to leverage internal resources to the fullest extent possible in order to maximize generated advantages by identifying assets, skills, and capabilities that have the potential to give an organization a performance edge over rivals.

According to the RBV theory, an organization's performance is greatly influenced by its organizational, physical, and human resources. As a result, it provides justification for elaborating on an argument for the impact of agility on an organization's performance. This is in line with Barney's (1991) hypothesis that an organization can gain a significant competitive advantage over its rivals by managing specific and unchangeable bundles of resources and dynamic capabilities. Barney further posited that this advantage can be achieved by reconfiguring both the available internal and external competencies in order to address the uncertain changes resulting from the dynamic environment.

The ability of the organization to outperform its competitors depends on the uniqueness of its resources in terms of their value, rarity, immutability, and non-substitutability, according to RBV theory. The resources might be material or intangible. According to Barney (1991), the management's access to physical, human, and organizational resources has a big impact on how well a company performs. An organization ability to manage unanticipated change successfully in a dynamic environment is an intangible resource in nature, and capable of improving performance for the organization (Kimani & Kilika, 2019). This introduces the idea of organizational agility as a vital resource to allow the organization to react quickly and swiftly to the ambiguous change in the environment.

Although the notion of RBV is still very important for today's firms, some scholars have tended to critique the theory as being too nebulous and static to help an organization gain a competitive edge in a changing, dynamic environment (Priem & Butler, 2001). According to Nanda (1996), RBV research's applicability in the field of strategic management is constrained by the absence of terminology overlap. While some scholars provide unique definitions for the key terms resources, capabilities, and competencies (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003), others (Ray, Barney, & Muhanna, 2004) use the terms interchangeably. Furthermore, the theory is restricted in that it does not sufficiently address how to rejuvenate either the existing stock of resources that are VRIN or inadequately sustainable resources in an unfavorable environment, or when to encourage additional valuable resources into the organization. RBV has been described as substantially tautological or circular in nature by other academics (Porter, 1991). According to (Hoopes, Madsen, & Walker, 2003), RBV lacks clarity in its fundamental components, which hinders the theory's advancement.

Despite the aforementioned criticism, RBV's contribution to the performance of Kenya's public universities is still very relevant and necessitates that these institutions manage the resources at their disposal effectively and efficiently in order to enhance performance in a dynamic and changing environment. Thus, based on the organizational resources available, these resources may be linked with environmental elements to produce a sustainable performance (Grant, 1991). The theory of RBV is relevant to this study since it articulates the nature and maximization of use of internal resources within the university control that gives it an improved performance in times of uncertainties in the unpredictable environment. This theory forms the foundation of the dynamic capability theory and in this study supports the agility enabler and responsiveness in the independent variable and research and internal processes in the dependent variable leaving other variables unsupported, hence a theoretical gap.

### **Learning Organization Theory**

The theory was created in 1973 by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, who offered a theoretical framework connecting the experience of living in a situation of increased change with the need for learning. They also suggested that learning occurs through the process of identifying and fixing errors in an organization (Argyris & Schon, 1988). According to these two scholars, institutions are in a continuous process of transformation and appropriate leadership style is pre-requisite in guiding, influencing and managing these transformations. This is achieved by becoming adept at learning through inventions and development of institutions that form the learning systems.

According to Fauske & Raybould (2015), many other scholars have made contributions to the understanding of this theory in organizations. These include the work of the Fayol School of Administrative Theory, Weber's Bureaucracy and Organization Structure, Simon's Administrative Behavior, and the Tylor School of



Management. The concept of a "learning organization" describes how knowledge is created, shared, and used inside an organization to alter its strategy. Leadbeater (2011) asserts that as an organization grows and gains experience and expertise in its operations, it should integrate the developed new learning into its overall work process for improved performance. A learning organization, according to Peter Senge's 1990 theory, necessitates a fresh perspective on leadership through the five essential disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and system thinking. According to Liedtka (1990), the system thinking notion is a key discipline that serves as a catalyst in creating a learning organization. It is a subset of strategic thinking.

It has been suggested that learning is the ideal mechanism through which organizations should change in order to adapt to the varied challenges from their environment. It is defined by the understanding that better performance in an organization depends on both individual and group learning (Finger and Brand, 1999; Anders, 2011). To achieve the objective of a learning organization, an institution must engage in and go through this process. With the continuous changing environment, institutions such as universities have to exhibit learning organization characteristics by involving their whole employees in a collective accountability directed towards shared values that will lead to improved performance (Watkins and Marsik, 1993). This is supported by Leadbeater (2000), who suggested that organizations should also invest in the flow of knowledge that will support the entity in addition to machinery to increase production efficiency.

Similar to this, institutions of higher learning should be adept at knowledge creation, appropriation, and exploitation to improve their performance in unpredictable environments (Fauske and Raybould, 2015). Failure to do so could spell disaster for the organization. Pedler, Burgoyne, and Boydell (2011) assert that learning organizations help their members learn and continuously develop into thriving institutions. Synthesis from previous studies on organizational studies and the extension of the theory of learning organization in institutions of learning has led to various assumptions about the theory. The first assumption is that the theory seeks to leverage an understanding of the shared mental models conceptual frameworks and routines for action within organization members (Garvin, 2000). It aims to answer questions that arise such as; how learning organization is influenced by the nature of an organizations work and the degree to which that work is measured, the extent to which the theory of individual learning applies to groups within the organization and also how the emerging leadership style in place impact on learning in the organization.

According to Fauske & Raybould (2015), the theory also assumes that the leadership mental models that include the beliefs, values, norms and assumptions as well as their routine actions and behaviours though closely connected can easily change independently of one another. Thirdly, it assumes that a level learning in an institution begins to emerge when mental models are shared across various individuals and at strategic levels in the organization. However, learning organization will not be attained if these mental models are not shared. Another assumption is that improved performance of an organization is observed when individual leader's mental models and the shared organizational mental models are similar for auctioning. The theory also assumes that the interpretation and measurement of mental model frameworks and auctioning at both group learning and organization learning go beyond the individual institution members.

Even while most organizational managers today recognize the importance of creating a learning organization with the goal of using knowledge as a corporate asset, Garvin (2000) claims that most are still unsure of where to begin. He continues by saying that any learning organization is built on a set of processes that can be created, implemented, and managed. These involves processing acquiring, interpreting and applying knowledge. That learning is achieved through effective leadership style by focusing and effectively deploying the three modes of learning- intelligence gathering, experience and experimentation. This theory is important to this study since the present environment is ever changing with a lot of uncertainty and new knowledge and ideas are a pre-requisite for improved performance for the public universities that fail to qualify at application of knowledge through academia-industry interlink. The hypothesis thus justifies the use of components measuring leadership style as the study's mediating variable, specifically, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire forms of leadership within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya.

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## Empirical Literature Review

### Organizational Agility, Leadership Style and performance

Akor (2014) looked into how the authoritarian leadership style affected academic librarians' performance on the job in Nigeria's Benue state. The study concentrated on 87 librarians working in higher education institutions in the state of Benue. The Autocratic Leadership Style Questionnaire (ALSQ) and the Job Performance of Academic Librarians Questionnaire (JPALQ) were used to gather data for the study. According to the survey, the managers of libraries in the state of Benue preferred democratic leadership over laissez-faire and autocratic leadership. The study also discovered that while the autocratic leadership style did not significantly affect academic librarians' work performance, it did result in poor performance. The study came to the conclusion that institutions management in Benue state, Nigeria, should promote the adoption of a democratic style in academic librarian administration through seminars and workshops.

Allafchi (2017) looked into the impact of democratic leadership style on managing customer communication in Mill Banks of Hamedan City. A sample of 192 individuals from a population of 381 was used with both descriptive and inferential statistics using the Morgan & Kerjisi table. Regression analysis was used in the study, and it was discovered that democratic leadership style has an impact on customer communication management through the dimensions of humanitarian benevolence, counseling, and communication. The study recommended using a democratic leadership style to manage customer communications in Hamedan City's Mill Banks.

Sharma, Kumar & Keshorjit (2013) did a study on characteristic of laissez-faire leadership style for 25 leaders from public and private sectors in the Indian state of Manipur. The study employed exploratory survey and analyzed traits of a laissez-faire leadership style in actual leadership practice. The top executives and two direct reports of selected organizations were interviewed and/or had questionnaires filled out in order to gather primary data. The study found that while employees had a lot of freedom to choose their own goals and course of action, lax leadership gave them little to no direction. The study concluded that further research on other leadership styles was necessary in organizations to give the leaders some autonomy on decision making.

Muraguri, Kimencu, and Thuo (2017) investigated how organizational leadership affected university performance in Kenya. The study was moderated by institutional environment with university policies and culture as indicators. The ability to develop clear strategies, employee empowerment, corporate priorities, infrastructure, and resource support were the operationalization criteria for organizational leadership. 289 randomly chosen respondents from the top and medium echelons of management were drawn from the target demographic of 25 universities. 168 respondents were selected for the study using a stratified random selection method, yielding an 88% response rate. Cross-sectional and explanatory studies were combined in a mixed study design. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to gather the data, and multiple regression analysis was used to analyze it. According to the study, organizational leadership significantly and favorably affected how well universities in Kenya performed. However, the institutional environment was not significant as a moderator. It was concluded that in order for universities in Kenya to maintain and enhance their performance, they must carefully embrace the proper leadership style and make an investment in their professional growth. This is in line with Murad & Gill's (2016) assertion that leadership plays a critical role in achieving good organizational performance.

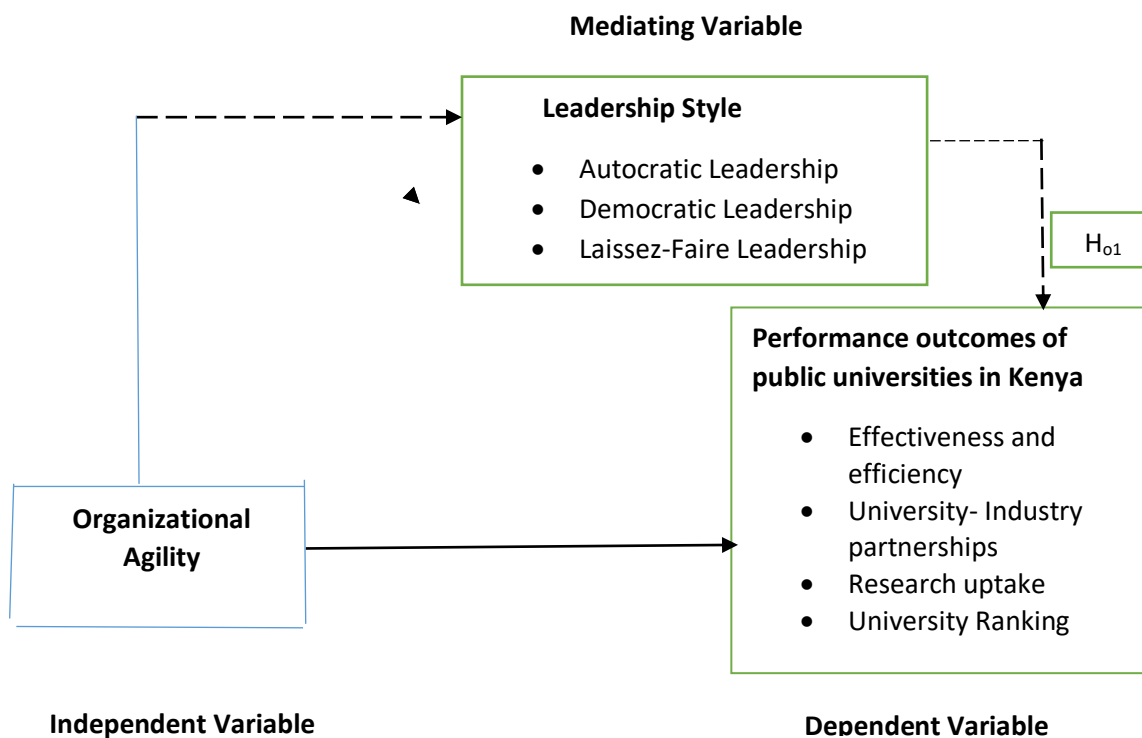
Dubey, Singh, and Gupta (2015) reviewed research on the mediating effect of leadership styles on the effects of agility, flexibility, and alignment on the performance of the humanitarian logistic system in India. The study employed a cross-sectional survey methodology. 306 top officers from the Indian Railways, the Department of Police, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Transport Corporation, and logistic businesses were chosen at random, and a structured questionnaire was sent to them through email attachment, followed by phone calls.

A confirmatory factor analysis was then conducted to assess the construct validity of the questionnaire instrument and the goodness of fit. The exploratory factor analysis was used to investigate the underlying relationships of the measured variables. The mediation effects of Baron & Kenny's (1986) and multiple linear

regression analysis were used to evaluate the hypotheses. The study found that the performance of human resources and logistical teams as well as supply chain alignment were strongly influenced by leadership style. This is in line with findings of work done by Dubey, Gunasekaran & Ali (2015) that found that appropriate leadership influences operational practices for an organization making it improve on its performance in the environment. The study therefore concluded that leadership style mediated the association between supply chain alignment and organization logistic performance.

### Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework describes the relationship between the many variables employed in the study. The conceptual framework below links the organizational agility as independent variable with the performance outcomes of public universities as dependent variable through the mediating effect of leadership style.



## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Research design

Research design is a method for both data collection and analysis. Bryman & Bell (2011) assert that the use of different designs in a single study enhances triangulation and increases the validity of the research findings. Both descriptive and explanatory research design methodologies was used in the current investigation. Descriptive research allows the researcher to observe and describe a subject's behaviour without affecting it in any manner and therefore avoiding any bias. On the other hand, the explanatory research design examines the cause-effect relationships between the variables and makes an effort to explain the nature of particular interactions in order to better understand the study problem. According to Lavrakas (2008), cross sectional survey design requires collecting information on a target population of interest at a specific point in time in order to draw conclusions and quantify the phenomenon under research. Muchemi (2013) adopted the same design.

### Target population

The whole set of all the units of analysis that the researcher plans to take into account for the intended study makes up the target population (Neuman, 2014). One of a researcher's top priorities is to identify the target population. All 31 of Kenya's chartered public universities that are fully operational are the study's target

population, as noted in Appendix II. (CUE, 2012). These public universities were targeted specifically for the survey because of their role in development of human capital for a country and the many challenges they currently face as a result of the uncertain changes in the environment that has affected their performance and require quick response. The study selected ten (10) public universities by systematic sampling from across the ranking scale locally, regionally and globally based on the web metrics world University ranking of January, 2023. This was found necessary to provide a uniform distribution of all universities that are engaged in research and are established with a balanced regional outlook and with adequate structures to support quick response in uncertain and unpredictable environmental circumstances. This criterion provided ten (10) public universities namely; University of Nairobi (UON), Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), South Eastern University of Kenya (SEKU), Pwani University (PU), University of Kabianga (UoK), Kibabii University (KIBU), Laikipia University (LU), University of Eldoret (UoEld) and Kirinyaga University (KyU) for the study as shown in Appendix I.

The respondents for the study were purposely selected due to the strategic nature of the study that require persons with decision making abilities in unpredictable circumstances in the environment the university operates in. The DVCs, Deans of Schools or Faculties, Heads of Academic Departments, and Senior Administrative Staff of Kenyan Public Universities were the primary subjects of this study. The administrative staff included Human Resource Manager (HRM), Chief Finance Officer (CFO), Information and Communication Technology director (ICT), Procurement Manager (PM), Public Relations Officer (PRO), Security Director, Quality Assurance Manager (QAM) and Audit Manager. These responses were chosen because they were found crucial to the development of policies that would ensure the long-term viability of these institutions. They are therefore assumed to be key personalities to enhance the concept of agility in high education institutions in uncertain changes arising from the environment. The responses were 488 in total throughout the ten universities, as shown in table 5.1 below.

**Table 5. 1: Distribution of the Target population for ten universities**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>UON</b>	<b>JKUAT</b>	<b>MMUST</b>	<b>SEKU</b>	<b>PU</b>	<b>UoK</b>	<b>Kibu</b>	<b>LU</b>	<b>UoEld</b>	<b>KyU</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
DVC	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	27	5.54
Dean-Schools/ Faculty	9	6	11	6	8	6	7	6	7	8	74	15.20
Academic Department heads	67	32	44	28	26	19	19	18	32	22	307	63.04
Senior Admin Staff	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	80	16.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>100</b>

**Sampling design.**

The sampling procedures refer to the process of choosing a sample from the population from whom the study is to be conducted (Kothari & Garg, 2014). The primary sources of information for this study's core data were the leaders of important administrative units at each university's three strategic levels of corporate, business, and function. These include; DVCs at corporate level (management) who were all sampled due to their small number per university, deans of schools or faculties at business level (senate), head of academic departments

and senior administration staff at functional level (departments). Due to the vice chancellors' obligations, which would interfere with the study's timely data collection process, they were not included in the study. As advised by Chauvet (2015), a multi-stage sampling strategy was used in this study to choose a representative sample of respondents and universities, using the university as the unit of analysis and functional units throughout the management hierarchy as the units of observation. Kilika (2012), Kiiru (2014) and Muthimi, Kilika & Kinyua (2021) used similar approaches.

Based on the criteria mentioned in section 3.5, the first stage involved choosing the appropriate public institutions from which responses were chosen. The second stage included choosing the strategic units within the chosen universities from which a sample was obtained. To maintain homogeneity, proportionate random sampling techniques was applied to create the three strata comprising of the DVCs at management, deans at senate and academic department heads and senior administrative staff at departments level. Since the DVCs were small in number across the selected universities, they were sampled by census. To sample the respondents at each stratum in accordance with the study's objectives, the Yamane formulas and simple random sampling was used in the third stage (Yamane, 1967; Adam, 2020).

Using the Yamane formula,  $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$ , where  $n$  is the sample size,  $N$  is the population size, and  $e$  is the required level of precision at a 95% confidence level, the study chooses a maximum margin of error of 0.05 at a 95% confidence level and assumes maximum variability because it is difficult to quantify variability proportions. With  $N=488$  and  $e = 0.05$  from section 3.6 above,  $n = 488 / (1 + 488(0.05)^2) = 220$

The distribution of units of observation based on the sample size calculated above was as follows: DVCs =17, Deans of schools/faculties =36, academic department heads = 127 and senior administrative staff = 40. As indicated in table 3.5 below, sample sizes for each unit of analysis will be allocated proportionally;

**Table 5. 2 : Distribution of Sample size per university per unit of observation**

Respo ndents	UO N	JKU AT	MMUS T	SEK U	PU	UoK	Kib u	LU	Uoel d	Kyu	Tota l
DVC	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	17
Dean- School s/Facul ty	5	3	5	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	36
Acade mic Depart ment heads	23	14	18	12	11	9	9	8	13	10	127
Senior Admin Staff	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>220</b>

The above table 5.2 shows the expected respondents to be used per unit of analysis and unit of observation.

### Data collection instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather the primary data (See Appendix II). The surveys examined the responses' observations, viewpoints, and opinions regarding the study's variables. The use of questionnaire to collected data was preferred since it ensured reliability of respondent's response, judgment and independence. The instrument had five components addressing different facets of the subject. The

respondents' demographic information, included length of working at the university, highest educational level reached, and other factors, were covered in Section A. Section B covered components of organizational Agility as dependent variables that included; organization readiness to change, agility enabler, responsiveness and agility practice. Section C covered Leadership style as a mediating variable, Section D covered institution environment as a moderating variable while Section E covered University performance as a dependent variable. The study adopted a 5-point monadic scale for section B through to E using 1= Not sure 2= strongly disagree, 3= disagree, 4= disagree, 5 =strongly agree. To substantiate the responses in the relevant parts and improve triangulation, open-ended questions were used.

### Pilot study

A pilot test was done with other experts' members in the target population for their opinions to ensure the questionnaire relevance and effectiveness. The pilot study is done to detect any weaknesses in the design of the instrument (Cooper & Schindler, 2013). According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a pilot study should be 1-10% of the sample size. Kothari (2009) recommends 1% of the sample size for pilot test. In this research, 10% of the sample was found sufficient for piloting and was drawn from a separate sample with homogenous characteristics from the same target population using online platform to quicken the process of testing and its reliability. The pilot data was analyzed for its relevance, design, content and usefulness in accordance with the research objectives in improving the questionnaire.

A pilot test of the study instrument was conducted with 20 participants, recruited from among academic division heads and deans of the chosen Kenyan universities. According to Field (2013), the participants in the pilot study were excluded from the final sample of participants.

The pilot test's findings showed that some of the questions lacked organization. Therefore, in order to remove any potential sources of ambiguity or inadequate language, the questionnaire was amended in light of the feedback that was received and the opinions of subject-matter experts. The researcher additionally depended on tools created in similar studies to further improve the content validity in terms of accuracy and applicability. This was also made feasible by the operationalization of the study variables that underpin the conceptual framework.

### Data Analysis and Presentation

The quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were applied in analyzing the various research variables (Greswell, 2014). The qualitative data explored and provided depth of understanding the relationship of the various variables.

## DATA ANALYSIS, RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data analysis, research findings and discussions based on analysis of descriptive, quantitative and qualitative data collected on the research variables consistent with the research objectives.

### Response Rate

The study administered 220 questionnaires in 10 public universities in Kenya and received 207 filled questionnaires while 13 were not returned. The results are as shown in Table 6.1.

**Table 6. 1: Response Rate**

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Response	207	94.1%
Non-response	13	5.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Source: Research data (2023)**

Table 6.1 above shows a response rate of 94.1% and non-response rate of 5.9%. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a response rate of above 50% is enough for analysis of data. Based on this argument, the response rate in this study of 95.1% is adequate for data analysis and sufficient to support achievement of set objectives. The high response rate was attributed to comprehensiveness of the data collection instrument and practiced data collection techniques that granted the respondents sufficient time to fill the questionnaires and the availability of the researcher and the research assistant to clarify any arising issues during the process of research work.

### Descriptive Analysis

Quantitative data on the study variables of organizational readiness to change, agility enabler, responsiveness and agility practice, the mediating effect of leadership style and moderating effect of institutional environment and university performance was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics that summarized major characteristics of the study variables were mean scores and standard deviation.

### Leadership style and University performance.

In the fifth variable, the study sought to determine the extent to which Leadership Style mediate the relationship between organizational agility and performance of selected public universities in Kenya. Descriptive statistics for institution environment are as shown in Table 4.7.

**Table 6. 2: Descriptive Statistics for Leadership Style**

	<b>LEADERSHIP STYLE</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
1	I feel I can approach tasks as I see fit, without much intervention]	4.12	0.80
2	I feel my opinions on anticipated change are valued and considered	3.78	0.93
3	I value autonomy in my team and belief can function optimally without my oversight.	4.00	0.86
4	Management allows employees to work independently most of the time	3.94	0.94
5	Management makes all decisions on anticipated change process but occasionally consults the staff.	3.20	0.97
6	Management makes decision on anticipated change process by consensus with the staff..	3.62	0.96
7	Management promotes open communication and feedback from staff]	3.79	0.88
8	The staff rarely have a say in the decision-making about change.	3.03	1.08
9	The university management makes all decisions on anticipated change process without seeking views of the staff.	3.02	1.05
	<b>Aggregate Mean and Standard deviation</b>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>0.941</b>

### Source Survey Data (2023)

The results in Table 6,2 show that the respondent agreed to a large extent that the public universities practiced Laissez-faire type of leadership as indicated by the mean scores of 4.12, 4.00 and 3.98 for items numbers 1, 3 and 4 respectively. The high standard deviation values of 0.8, 0.86, and 0.94, respectively, indicate a significant variation in the respondents' viewpoints. Furthermore, the participants expressed a moderate degree of agreement that public universities employ a democratic leadership style, as demonstrated by the mean scores of 3.78, 3.62, and 3.79 for items 2, 6, and 7, respectively. The corresponding standard deviations of 0.93, 0.96, and 0.88 respectively demonstrate the wide range of respondents' opinions. The survey also found

that, as shown by the mean scores of 3.20, 3.03, and 3.02 for items 5, 8, and 9, respectively, respondents agreed less strongly that autocratic leadership was used in Kenya's public universities. Conversely, the high standard deviation values of 0.97, 1.08, and 1.05, respectively, indicate a significant variance in the respondents' perspectives regarding the three items.

Despite having differing viewpoints, the respondents generally agreed as seen by the total aggregate mean of 3.62 and standard deviation of 0.941 that leadership style affects public university performance in Kenya. This finding is consistent with research by Muraguri, Kimenju, and Thuo (2017), who found that Kenyan universities must carefully adopt an appropriate leadership style in order to maintain and improve their performance, as well as research by Murad and Gills (2016), who found that effective leadership is essential to an organization's success. This finding is also supported by the attributes of learning organization theory that new knowledge and ideas are a pre-requisite for improved organization performance in an ever changing environmental situations.

**Test of Hypothesis**

The objective of the study was to determine the mediating influence of leadership style within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes public universities in Kenya. The objective of the study tested the null hypothesis that: Leadership style has no mediating effect on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of selected public universities in Kenya. The study used the four-causal step approach advocated by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test the hypothesis. In the first step, organizational agility was regressed on university performance as shown in Table 6.3

**Table 6.3: Regression Results for organizational agility and university Performance**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.268 <sup>a</sup>	.072	.067	3.17542
a. Predictors: (Constant), ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY				

Source: Survey Data (2023)

Model summary results in Table 6.3 above indicate that the adjusted R square (R2) is 0. 067 implying that 6.7% of all the variations in performance of selected public universities in Kenya are explained by organizational agility. The results also show that 93.3% of variations in performance of selected public universities in Kenya are predicted by other variables other than organizational agility. The study conducted F-test in Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to establish the fitness of the model and the results are as shown in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4 : ANOVA test for organizational agility and university performance**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	159.340	1	159.340	15.802	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2067.076	205	10.083		
	Total	2226.415	206			
a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY						

Source: Survey Data (2023)



The results in Table 6.4 show that the F-statistic for the model is 15.802 which is higher than the F-critical (1, 205 at 0.05 = 3.9112). Similarly, the P-value is 0.000<0.05 and therefore significant. The study therefore concludes that the model is fit in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya. To establish the significance of organizational agility in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya, a t-test was conducted and the results are shown in Table 6.5 below.

**Table 6.5: Coefficients for organizational agility and university Performance**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	30.527	1.934		15.786	.000
	ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY	.299	.075	.268	3.975	.000

a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE

**Source: Survey Data (2023)**

The results in Table 6.5 indicates that the constant has a coefficient of 30.527 meaning that if all other factors are held constant, performance of selected public universities in Kenya would be equal to 30.527 units. At the same time, it is established that organizational agility has a coefficient of 0.299 implying that holding all other factors constant, increasing organizational agility by one unit would result in 0.299 units increase in performance of selected public universities in Kenya. The coefficient is also significant at P<0.05. These results show that organizational agility is significant in predicting university performance, hence there is a relationship to be mediated.

The models is thus summarized as:

$$\text{University Performance} = 30.527 + 0.299 \text{ Organizational Agility} \dots\dots\dots(6.1).$$

In the second step, Leadership style is regressed on organizational agility and the results are as shown in Tables 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 below.

**Table 6.6: Regression Results for Leadership style and organizational agility**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.351 <sup>a</sup>	.123	.119	4.38530

a. Predictors: (Constant), ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

**Source: Survey Data (2023)**

Model summary results shown in Table 6.6 indicate that the adjusted R square (R2) value is 0.119, meaning that organizational agility explains 11.9 % of all the variation in leadership style. The results imply that 88,1 % of variations in leadership style of selected public universities in Kenya are explained by other variables other than organizational agility. To determine the fitness of the model, the study conducted an F-test and the results are as shown in Table 6.7 below.

**Table 6.7: ANOVA test for organizational agility and leadership style**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	555.425	1	555.425	28.882	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3942.324	205	19.231		
	Total	4497.749	206			

a. Dependent Variable: LEADERSHIP STYLE

b. Predictors: (Constant), ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

**Source: Survey Data (2023)**

The ANOVA in Table 6.7 shows that F-statistic was 28.882 which is greater than the F Critical of 3.9112. The F-statistic is therefore significant (0.000<0.05). The study concluded that the model is fit in the prediction of leadership style. To establish the significance of organizational agility in predicting leadership style, a t-test was conducted as shown in Table 6.8.

**Table 6.8: Coefficients for organizational agility and leadership style**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	18.244	2.671		6.831	.000
	ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY	.558	.104	.351	5.374	.000

a. Dependent Variable: LEADERSHIP STYLE

**Source: Survey Data (2023)**

Table 6.8 shows that the constant has a coefficient of 18.244 suggesting that if organizational agility is held constant, leadership style of selected public universities in Kenya would be equal to 18.244 units. Similarly, organizational agility has a coefficient of 0.558 implying that if all other factors are held constant, one-unit increase in organizational agility will lead to 0.558 units increase in leadership style. Both the constant and organizational agility were significant with P-values 0.000<0.05. The study therefore concluded that organizational agility significantly predicts leadership style. The model is therefore summarized below as:

$$Leadership\ Style = 18.244 + 0.558\ Organizational\ Agility \dots\dots\dots(6.2)$$

In the third step, the study sought to establish the significance of leadership style in predicting the performance of selected public universities in Kenya. To this end, leadership style was regressed on performance of selected public universities and the regression results are as shown in table 6.9, 6.10 and 6.11 below.

**Table 6.9: Model Summary for Leadership style and University performance**

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.212 <sup>a</sup>	.045	.040	3.22062

a. Predictors: (Constant), LEADERSHIP STYLE
b. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The results in table 6.9 indicate that the value of adjusted R square (R2) is 0.040, meaning that leadership style is explained 4.0 % of variation in performance of selected public universities in Kenya while 96.0 % of variations are explained by other variables other than leadership style.

To determine the fitness of the model, the study conducted an F-test and the results are as shown in Table 6.10 below.

**Table 6.10: ANOVA test for Leadership style and University performance**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	100.079	1	100.079	9.649	.002 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2126.336	205	10.372		
	Total	2226.415	206			
a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), LEADERSHIP STYLE						

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From the above Table 6.10, the F-statistic for the model was 9.649 which is greater than the F-critical of 3.9112. The P-value is 0.002<0.05 suggesting that the model is fit in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya. To test the significance of leadership style in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya, a t-test was conducted at 0.05 level of significance and the results as shown in Table 6.11 below.

**Table 6.11: Coefficients for Leadership style and University performance**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	33.316	1.577		21.129	.000
	LEADERSHIP STYLE	.149	.048	.212	3.106	.002
a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE						

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The coefficient results in Table 6.11 indicate that the constant has a coefficient of 33.316 while leadership style has a coefficient of 0.149. These results indicate that if leadership style is held constant, performance of selected public universities in Kenya would be equal to 33.316 units. Similarly, the results postulates that, holding all other factors constant, a unit increase in leadership style would result in 0.149 units increase in performance of selected public universities in Kenya.

The results in Table 6.11 are therefore summarized as:

$$\text{University Performance} = 33.316 + 0.149 \text{ Leadership style} \dots \dots \dots (6.3)$$

In the fourth step, the study sought to determine the effect of organizational agility and leadership style on performance of selected public universities in Kenya. To achieve this, the study regressed performance of selected public university on organizational agility and leadership style. The results are as shown in tables 6.12, 6.13 and 6.14 below;

**Table 6.12: Model Summary for Leadership Style, Organizational Agility and University Performance**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.296 <sup>a</sup>	.087	.079	3.15584
a. Predictors: (Constant), LEADERSHIP STYLE, ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY				

Source: Survey Data (2023)

From Table 6.12, the value of adjusted R square (R<sup>2</sup>) is 0.079, suggesting that both organizational agility and leadership style explained 7.9 % of variation in performance of selected public universities in Kenya while 92.1 % of all variations were explained by other factors other than organizational agility and leadership style.

The study conducted ANOVA test to establish the fitness of the model to predict performance of selected public universities in Kenya. The results are as shown in Table 6.13 below.

**Table 6.13: ANOVA test for Organizational Agility, Leadership Style and University Performance**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	194.712	2	97.356	9.775	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2031.704	204	9.959		
	Total	2226.415	206			
a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE						
b. Predictors: (Constant), LEADERSHIP STYLE, ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY						

Source: Survey Data (2023)

The ANOVA results in Table 6.13 show that F-statistic is 9.775 which is greater than the F-critical of 3.0644. The P-value is significant at 0.000<0.05. Based on outcome of these results, the study concluded that the model was fit in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya.

To determine the significance of organizational agility and leadership style in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya, a T-test was conducted and the results are as shown in Table 6.14 below.

**Table 6.14: Coefficients for Organizational Agility, Leadership Style and University Performance**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	28.799	2.129		13.524	.000
	ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY	.246	.080	.220	3.083	.061
	LEADERSHIP STYLE	.095	.050	.135	1.885	.041

a. Dependent Variable: UNIVERSITY PERFORMANCE

**Source: Survey Data (2023)**

The model in table 6.14 indicates that the constant has a coefficient of 28.799 with a P-value of  $0.000 < 0.05$ , organizational agility has a coefficient of 0.246 while competitive advantage has a coefficient of 0.095. It is thus established that holding organizational agility and leadership style constant, performance of selected public universities in Kenya would be equal to 28.799 units. In addition, holding all other factors constant and increasing organizational agility by one unit would result in 0.246 units increase in performance of selected public universities in Kenya. Besides, holding all other factors constant and increasing leadership style by one unit would result in 0.095 units increase in performance of selected public universities in Kenya.

The results in Table 6.14 are summarized as:

$$\text{University performance} = 28.799 + 0.246\text{Organizational agility} + 0.095\text{Leadership style}..(6.4)$$

The decision on the mediating effect of leadership style on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of selected public universities in Kenya is based on the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986). The recommendation is that complete mediating effect is said to occur if the independent variable is non-significant and the mediator is significant in predicting the dependent variable. The results in table 6.14 indicates that the independent variable is no longer significant at p- value  $0.061 < 0.05$  in predicting the dependent variable after the introduction of the mediator. The P-value of leadership style as the mediator is  $0.041 < 0.05$  indicating that it was significant.

The study, thus established that organizational agility is significant in predicting performance of selected public universities in Kenya. Organizational agility is also significant in predicting leadership style and leadership style is significant in predicting university performance. Consequently, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that leadership style has a complete mediating effect on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of selected public universities in Kenya. The findings on this variable are in line with the postulates of the learning organization theory that supports that effective learning is achieved through an appropriate and effective leadership style in an organization.

A review of extant literature established that few studies have used leadership style as a mediating variable while pursuing to extend the relationship between organizational agility and performance. However, none of the reviewed literature conceptualized leadership style as a mediator of the relationship between organization agility and university performance. For example, Dubey, Singh and Gupta (2015) incorporated leadership style as a mediating variable on relationship between agility, flexibility, alignment and performance of humanitarian logistic system in India. Their findings were that the performance of human resources and logistical teams and supply chain alignment were strongly influenced by the practiced leadership style. Similarly, a study by Muraguri, Kimencu & Thuo (2017) concluded that universities in Kenya must impress appropriate leadership style to achieve good organizational performance. This study therefore enhances the empirical literature by incorporating leadership style as a mediator on relationship between organizational agility and university performance.

**Analysis of Qualitative Data**

The open-ended questions in the questionnaire were used to obtain qualitative data in the study. The study used content analysis to analyze qualitative data by bringing out meanings in the responses. The results of the analysis were presented for various specific objectives as follows;

## Study objective.

The objective of the study was to determine the mediating influence of leadership style within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya. The respondents were requested to indicate their opinion on how leadership style affects their performance by examining best style of leadership to practice between autocratic, democratic, or laissez-faire during change process in the public universities. The democratic leadership was favored among the participants, valuing its inclusivity and collaborative approach. However, there is also a recognition of the potential benefits of adapting appropriate leadership style that meets the specific demands and contexts of various change scenarios within the university.

## Summary of the Study

The study's goal was to ascertain how mediating influence of leadership style within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes in public universities in Kenya. The null hypothesis tested was that leadership style has no mediating influence on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of public universities in Kenya. The study found that leadership style has a complete mediation effect on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of public universities in Kenya, hence significant. The study noted that most respondents though with varied opinions agreed to a large extent that Leadership style has an effect on performance of public Universities in Kenya.

The results further showed that democratic leadership was favored among the participants, valuing its inclusivity and collaborative approach compared to autocratic and laissez-faire styles of leadership. However, there is also a recognition of the potential benefits of adapting appropriate leadership styles to meet the specific demands and contexts of various change scenarios within the universities. This concurs with findings of research by Muraguri, Kimenju and Thuo (2017) that adoption of appropriate leadership style was key to improved performance of universities in Kenya.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on mediating influence of leadership styles within the nexus of organizational agility and performance outcomes of public universities in Kenya. On the basis of the findings above, the study inferred some important conclusions. First, leadership style had a complete mediating effect on the relationship between organizational agility and performance of public universities in Kenya and secondly, the democratic leadership style was found favourable leadership practice in public universities to drive uncertain change, valuing its inclusivity and collaborative approach. Thirdly, there is also a recognition of the potential benefits of adapting other leadership styles to meet the specific demands and contexts of various change scenarios within the public universities in Kenya. The study therefore recommends that public universities should encourage participation of employees in idea generation on change initiatives by practicing democratic leadership style. Further future studies should also incorporate information from other global institutions of higher learning to enrich research on influence of leadership styles on performance of universities.

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## APPENDIX I:

### Kenya's Public Universities Webometrics Transparent Ranking 2023

Name of University	Local Ranking	Africa Ranking	2020	World Ranking 2021	2022	2023
University of Nairobi (UON)	1	13	993	1054	1101	1076
Kenyatta University	2	43	1598	1915	2151	2064
Egerton University	3	50	1884	2020	2429	2378
<b>Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)</b>	4	62	2773	2204	2519	2466
Moi University	5	56	1954	2107	2611	2490
Maseno University	6	97	4135	2909	3559	3475
Technical University of Kenya	7	140	7599	3540	3784	3764
Masinde Muliro University of Science & Technology (MMUST)	8	209	5222	4802	5255	5032
Muranga University of Technology	9	227	11546	5176	5762	5649
University of Embu	10	226	16655	5136	7217	5791
South Eastern Kenya University (SEKU)	11	272	7903	5962	7379	6883
Dedan Kimathi University of Technology	12	301	9319	6622	7184	7031
Meru University of Science & Technology	13	359	11925	8012	9101	7103
Pwani University (PU)	14	316	9291	7101	6266	7703
Kibabii University (KIBU)	15	346	7819	7689	8349	8618
Machakos University	16	284	13358	6198	8598	8817
Kisii University	17	334	9179	7403	9001	8939
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science & Technology	18	333	11052	7403	9495	9355
Chuka University	19	403	13255	8962	9879	9892
Karatina University	20	387	11611	8638	9890	10283
Maasai Mara University	21	380	10852	8459	10371	10510
University of Kabianga (UoK)	22	492	14121	12975	12743	11471
Cooperative University of Kenya	23	640	13841	16151	11689	11591
Rongo University	24	462	14070	11691	12603	12004
Technical University of Mombasa	25	435	17475	10228	12386	12915
<b>Laikipia University (LU)</b>	26	512	10397	13588	12271	12951
Taita Taveta University	27	503	15941	13268	13457	13245
University of Eldoret (UoEld)	28	342	10759	7599	8972	14115
Garissa University	29	576	15292	15043	14604	14350
Multimedia University of Kenya	30	971	24556	22620	16652	15524
Kirinyaga University (Kyu)	31	706	21325	17181	15591	17011