

THE EFFECT OF AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF FIVE-STAR HOTELS IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF FAIRMONT THE NORFOLK HOTEL NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry in Kenya is currently facing challenges in recovering to its earlier performance levels before the Covid-19 pandemic. Leadership is framed as one of the contributory factors to the effective utilization of organizational resources and capabilities valuable in navigating crisis periods and moving organizations toward fulfilling performance targets. This study aimed to explore autocratic leadership style and organizational performance of Five Star Hotels in Kenya. A case of Fairmont The Norfolk Hotel Nairobi. The study applied a census on the target population of 177 staff of Fairmont The Norfolk Hotel Nairobi. Primary data was collected through Google Survey Forms and the results were analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis. The findings indicated that strict supervision was practiced as the leaders in the organization followed their employee's actions and activities closely. The leaders sought to control how specific roles, duties and functions were carried out. The study further determined that leaders did use hierarchical engagement when interacting with employees. The overall mean of autocratic leadership indicated that autocratic leadership was practiced to a low extent. The regression findings indicated that autocratic leadership had a positive and insignificant effect on organizational performance. It is recommended the authoritative or autocratic leadership style be utilised sparingly in contexts where employees may benefit from increased oversight and close guidance as its overall impact on organizational performance was determined as not being considerable. The study was restricted to autocratic leadership style which raises the need for further studies on the effect of other types of leadership such as the laissez-faire, servant-leadership and authentic leadership styles on performance of establishments in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: Autocratic Leadership Style, Organisational Performance, Five-star hotels, Hospitality, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is unique as its firms operate in highly interactive environments emphasizing customer-centricity. This magnifies the contribution of every individual employee in creating value for customers and raising returns for the organization (Inversini, De Carlo & Masiero, 2020). Organizational performance has been approached from a variety of dimensions over the years. According to Abu-Mahfouz (2019), performance originates after evaluating an outcome against an input based upon a set of expectations. Effective measurement of an organization's outcomes ensures that a firm has reliable metrics to indicate whether a firm is positively progressing in meeting its broad stakeholder objectives. Manoharan and Singal (2019) noted that organizational performance in the hospitality sector was considered in terms of outcomes related to finance, guests, employees and society. Finance outcomes would for instance, be indicated by cost efficiency and occupancy rate, while guest outcomes would be viewed from service ratings and guest satisfaction while employees would be viewed against measures such as employee engagement surveys and employee turnover.

The Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers (2020) described Kenya's hospitality as one of the nation's prime deliverables, with diverse products and experiences that served local and foreign visitors. Kenya's hospitality industry faces unique and general challenges similar to those facing the global hospitality industry. Kamani (2022) noted that the sector's recovery was decelerated by ramifications emerging from the 2020 worldwide pandemic, the continuing Russian-Ukraine war and the Kenyan currency's continued depreciation, which has caused an increase in fuel and food items cost. Further, challenges such as rising living costs have affected domestic tourism, while competition from rival destinations in Africa is also impacting the resurgence of Kenyan hotels.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Kenyan hospitality sub-sector contracted 83% during 2020, effectively grounding firms such as hotels and resorts (Wachira & Kandie, 2021). Five-Star establishments offering World class hospitality services, such as the Fairmont The Norfolk Hotel,

Intercontinental Hotel and the Tribe Hotel, experienced closures (Wachira & Kandie, 2021). According to the Monetary Policy Committee Hotels Survey (2022), only 21% of establishments offering accommodative services in Kenya have found full recovery with only 37% of stakeholders in the sector expecting a return to normalcy in the near future. Apart from the influence of the pandemic, internal challenges caused by low staff retention rates, low employee motivation and inability to diversify, have also contributed to the closure of Kenyan hotels (Kahongeh, 2023). Leadership styles are suggested to be influential determinants of whether crises can be effectively addressed or left to pose significant enough barriers to competitiveness and survival (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019). Given that the Hospitality industry is still in the process of resurgence, leadership is a key component of the revival. Therefore, there was need to identify whether autocratic leadership styles result in performance of organizations in the Kenyan hospitality industry.

OBJECTIVE

The objective guiding this study was to determine the effect of autocratic leadership style on organizational performance of Five-Star Hotels in Kenya. A Case Study of Fairmont The Norfolk Hotel Nairobi

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Lewin's Leadership Model

Lewin's model was initially formulated by Lewin and Lippit (1937) and then refined in conjunction with Ralph White (1938). According to Lewin, Lippit and White (1938), three distinct forms of leadership are exhibited in contexts with a follower-leader relationship. These styles are authoritarian/autocratic, the democratic/participative and the Laissez-faire/non-intervention styles. The model suggests that certain elements that differentiate between the different leadership styles are distinct.

Lewin, Lippit and White (1938) indicated that these elements were in decision-making, control, follower input and involvement. Autocratic leaders monopolized decision-making, sought to control every aspect related to tasks and sought to limit input and certain types of participation from followers. Democratic leaders, on the other hand, were open to collective

decision-making, took oversight roles in controlling activities, and were accommodative of follower inputs and expanded involvement. Laissez-faire leaders were less hands-on and delegated crucial aspects such as decision making to subordinates, had little or no control over subordinate actions and viewed involvement as the responsibility of followers (Lewin, Lippit & White, 1938).

Despite being framed as traditional leadership styles, the autocratic and democratic leadership styles endure in organizations and have become critical to the performance of modern-day organizations. Kaur and Singh (2022) indicated that autocratic leadership was an individual-driven style that was feasible when performance depended on quick decision-making, centralised power, enforcement of regulations and clear hierarchies. Autocratic leaders could hinder follower creativity, lower motivation and cause a reduction in employee commitment, all factors that contribute negatively to organizational performance (Khan, Wahab & Bhatti, 2021).

Lewin's leadership model comprising of autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire, has been applied in delineating two leadership styles. Bowen (2023) indicated that the service of leadership required leaders to pivot between leadership styles as no single style could be said to offer a leader what was necessary for balancing their own needs, followers' needs and organizational needs. Lewin's leadership model covers two leadership styles indicated to be determinants of performance in among firms offering hospitality as a product. Autocratic leadership and democratic leadership, while still viewed as traditional, are still applied in the hospitality sector since they are both unique in contributing to organizational performance within the industry (Huertas, Gallego & Llorens, 2019). Therefore, Lewin's model explicated the characteristics of autocratic leadership style that could influence how an organization performs.

Empirical Literature Review

Jony et al. (2019) evaluated the influence of the autocratic leadership style on the success of restaurants in Bangladesh. The study also assessed the role of democratic and laissez-faire on organizational performance. The styles conceptualization arose from the

behavioural theory. Success for organizations was given by measures which were; level of profitability, customer numbers, customer satisfaction, worker satisfaction and learning and knowledge levels of employees. 60 workers from various Bangladesh restaurants from the food district of Mymensingh were approached randomly after being judgementally selected. A questionnaire was used to collect information and analysis consisted of descriptive and regression computations. It was determined that autocratic leadership was negative and insignificantly related with organizational performance with democratic leadership being positive and significant and laissez-faire being positive and insignificant on organizational performance. It was suggested to hospitality owners in Bangladesh that they should embrace democratic leadership as opposed to autocratic which was noted to have negative effects.

Maithya (2020) assessed the role of autocratic leadership styles on business performance with specific focus on Youth owned SMEs with operations in Nairobi County. The study further assessed how transformational and transactional leadership influenced the performance in SMEs. Using the descriptive correlational paradigm, the study considered the 650 enterprises where the Yamene formula was ascertained a sample of 248 participants. The study made use of descriptive, correlation and regression techniques in computation of the questionnaire-collected data. The findings indicated autocratic leadership styles had positive influence on performance which was given by profitmaking, market share and work yields. It was further determined that transformational and transactional leadership styles were also positive with their role being significant on business performance. The study recommended autocratic leaders become accommodative to their employees' insight during the decision-making processes as it could result in long-term beneficial outcomes.

Summary of Research Gaps

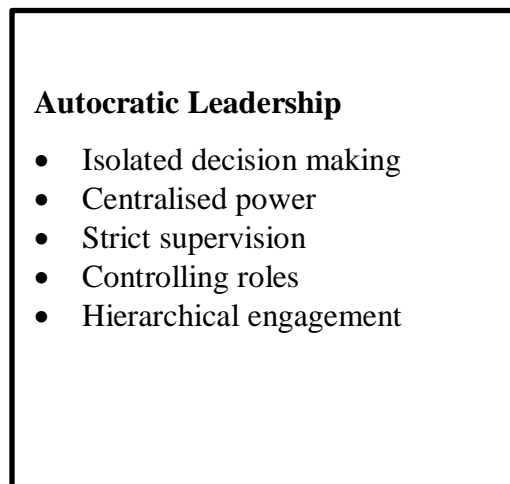
Extant literature suggests a lack of clarity on how autocratic leadership affects organizational performance. Some studies have suggested a positive () and others have indicated a negative relationship (Jony et al. (2019) with others finding the relationship as insignificant (Nazarian, Atkinson, Foroudi & Edirisinghe, 2021). This pointed out a need

to further investigate the link between autocratic leadership and organizational performance. Further, Jony et al. (2019) findings were contextualised to the Bangladesh hospitality sector whose culture and social background is different from Kenya. The study did not also consider five-star hotels as it only covered restaurants. Goyal, Kiran and Bose (2023) findings were limited to autocratic and transformational leadership as leadership styles most relevant to Indian family-owned hospitality firms. These are some of the gaps the study sought to cover in investigating the effect of integrative leadership styles on organizational performance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework articulates how a study understands the connection between the factors being investigated (Luft, Jeong, Idsardi & Gardner., 2022). As exhibited in Figure 1, autocratic leadership style is presumed to affect organizational performance, which is the dependent factor.

Independent Variable



Dependent Variable

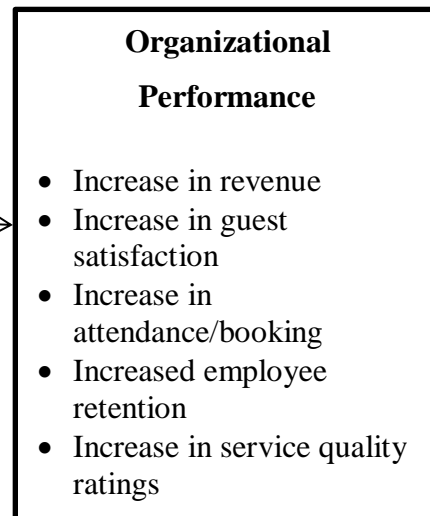


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study applied a descriptive research design. Mishra and Alok (2022) described the descriptive research design as relevant in studies that seek to conduct fact-finding investigations without changing how the investigated variables interrelate in real life. Pandey and Pandey (2021) indicated that the descriptive research design was relevant for studies aiming to apply survey methods to gather data that would aid in describing characteristics of particular groups, individuals or situations. The design is also applied when investigating how a given set of variables are related. Therefore, the descriptive design enabled this study to investigate how integrative leadership styles are related to organizational performance.

Target Population

The target population pertains to a subset of an entire population. Thacker (2020) describes the target population as the collection of persons or entities displaying specific characteristics or criteria needed for research. Willie (2022) indicates that conclusions arrived at in the subset can be generalised to the entire population. The target population as indicated in Table 3 comprised of 177 staff from Fairmont The Norfolk hotel, Nairobi.

Sampling and Sampling Technique

Sampling entails the steps taken when choosing a representative or representatives from a large population for research purposes (Bhardwaj, 2019). The activity is considered when studying a large population is not feasible or practical. Sampling technique refers to the strategy utilised in identifying research participants and it may be done using probability or non-probability methods (Stratton, 2021). The sampling strategy influences the ability of a research to gain representative data that typifies the targeted population. The study implemented the census sampling technique. The census sampling technique avoids the risk of bias and non-representativeness as all prospective participants possess a likelihood of participating (Ochsner, 2021).

Instruments

The research collected primary data using Google Forms questionnaires. The study drew up a structured questionnaire that consists of close-ended statements. The close-ended statements followed a Likert scale. Each score indicated a respondent's level of agreement or disagreement. A rating of 1 will indicated strong disagreement, 2-disagreement, 3-neutral, 4-agreement and 5-strong agreement. The questionnaire consisted of three major sections: The first collected information on demographic data, the second sourced information on integrative leadership styles, and the third collected information on organizational performance.

Pilot Study

The study conducted a pilot survey as a preparation exercise for the main survey which aided in ascertaining the research tool's reliability and validity. Extant literature suggests pilot studies may be carried out with a sample size equal to 10% of the population forming the target (Amin & Saad, 2022). Therefore, the study selected 18 employees from Fairmont Mara Safari Club to participate as the pilot's respondents.

Validity

The validity of data gathering tools ultimately determines whether the inferences derived from the study can be considered to represent the phenomenon being investigated accurately (Clark & Watson, 2019). A research tool is termed as having validity when its items accurately measure their intended constructs (Da Cunha, Sonza, Bachur & Bernardo-Filho, 2020). The study applied content validity as the technique for evaluating whether the questionnaire was valid. Content validity was done by enlisting research specialists, such as the research supervisor, assessed whether the research tool effectively measures its intended constructs. The study also applied convergent validity tests. According to Surucu and Maslakci (2020), convergent validity affirms whether the items designed to measure a given variable are related to each other.

Reliability Test

Reliability is measured to ascertain consistency levels in research tools (Surucu & Maslakci, 2020). An instrument with reliability yields consistent results across its various items. The study conducted questionnaire reliability tests using the Cronbach alpha test. The Cronbach alpha test compares the level of covariance shared by items in a questionnaire against the overall variance (Amirrudin, Nasution & Supahar, 2021).

Data Collection Procedure

The collection exercise commenced once a letter authorising the activity was obtained from The Management University of Africa. Data was sourced using the web-based research collection tool, Google Forms. The researcher requested the management of Fairmont The Norfolk Hotel to assist with the email addresses of the hotel staff. Google Forms eased the collection of information while maintaining the participants' security and privacy. Furthermore, using Google Forms allowed the study to secure the data so that it can only be accessed by the researcher. The ease in which one can access of Google Forms allowed the researcher to monitor the collection exercise's progress. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the survey and gentle reminders were sent to respondents to foster greater response rates.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Analysis procedures commenced once the data collection exercise was completed. The collected data was retrieved from Google Forms and transferred to Excel spreadsheets where it was cleaned, coded and transferred to version 28 of the Social Package for Social Sciences. The study conducted descriptive and inferential forms of analysis. The descriptive analysis is meant to aid the study in generating means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviation. These statistics served in giving basic insight concerning the respondent's background information and the study variables. The inferential analysis consisted of regression analysis. The regression analysis gave insight on how the variables related and whether the relationships were significant. The equation below was employed in illustrating the relationship between integrative leadership styles and organizational performance.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y= Organizational Performance; X₁= Autocratic Leadership Style; X₂= Transformational Leadership Style; X₃= Transactional Leadership Style; X₄=Democratic Leadership Style; α= Constant of the model; β₁- β₄= regression coefficients.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted descriptive and regression analysis. The findings are presented in this section.

Descriptive Findings on Autocratic Leadership Style

The respondents were asked to rate the application of the autocratic leadership style in their organization as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Autocratic Leadership Style

Statements on autocratic leadership style	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (S.D)
The decision-making roles in the hotel are restricted to the leadership team.	2.6136	1.39600
Leaders exhibit limited sharing of power among employees.	2.6364	1.40486
Leaders closely follow employee actions and activities through strict supervision.	3.2273	1.37364
Leaders seek to control how specific roles, duties and functions are carried out.	3.2727	1.41470
The interaction between the leadership and employees is through hierarchical engagement.	2.9167	1.46742
Overall Mean & Standard Deviation	2.9333	1.4113

Table 1 indicates that respondents disagreed that decision-making roles in the hotel were restricted to the leadership team (M=2.6136, SD=1.39600). It was also found that leaders in the organization did not exhibit limited sharing of power among employees (M=2.6364, SD=1.40486). There was slight agreement among respondents that leaders closely followed employee actions and activities through strict supervision (M=3.2273, SD=1.37364). Further, respondents had a slight agreement that leaders sought to control how specific roles, duties and functions were carried out (M= 3.2727, SD=1.41470). The respondents

disagreed that the interaction between leadership and employees was through hierarchical engagement (M=2.9167, SD=1.46742). The overall rating of autocratic leadership indicates that the leadership style was limited in application in the organization (M=2.9333, SD=1.4113).

Table 2: Organizational Performance

Statements on	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (S.D)
The hotel's revenues have increased by significant margins in the last one year	39.4%	28.8%	22.7%	4.5%	4.5%	3.94	1.10348
Our hotels guests have been showing increased levels of satisfaction.	47%	28%	17.4%	3.8%	3.8%	4.11	1.06476
There has been a notable increase in the number of bookings	40.2%	29.5%	22%	2.3%	6.1%	3.95	1.12476
The hotel's employee retention rates have shown improvements	36.4%	26.5%	17.4%	9.8%	9.8%	3.70	1.31891
There has been an improvement in the hotel's service quality ratings	43.2%	27.3%	22.7%	3%	3.8%	4.03	1.06247
Overall Mean & Standard Deviation						3.95	1.1249

Table 2 provides that respondents strongly agreed that the hotel revenue increased by significant margins in the last year one year (M=3.94, S.D=1.10348). The respondents also strongly concurred that their hotel's guests had been showing increased satisfaction levels (M=4.11, S.D=1.06476). There was strong agreement that there had been a notable increase in the number of bookings (M=3.95, S.D=1.12476). There was moderate agreement among respondents that their employee retention rates had exhibited improvements (M=3.70, S.D=1.31891). It was determined from the strong agreement that there was an improvement in hotel's service quality ratings (M= 4.03, S.D=1.06247). The overall rating of organizational performance was relatively high, indicating that respondents considered the application of integrative leadership styles as being influential on organizational performance (M=3.9455, S.D=1.1249).

Inferential Analysis

The study derived inferences concerning the relationship between autocratic leadership styles and organizational performance by conducting regression analysis. The influence of autocratic leadership on organizational performance was also determined to be positive with 0.080 units expected if the style of leadership was increased by one unit as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Coefficient analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.634	.339		1.872	.064
Autocratic leadership style	.080	.062	.085	1.293	.198

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study sought to determine the effect of autocratic leadership on the organizational performance of Five-Star Hotels in Kenya. It was established that decision-making roles in the organizations were not restricted to the hotel's leadership and that the leaders in the hotel did not limit the sharing of power among their employees. The findings indicated that strict supervision was practiced as the leaders in the organization followed their employee's actions and activities closely. The leaders sought to control how specific roles, duties and functions were carried out. The study further determined that leaders did use hierarchical engagement when interacting with employees. The overall mean of autocratic leadership (M=2.9333) indicated that autocratic leadership was practiced to a low extent. The regression findings indicated that autocratic leadership had a positive and insignificant effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.080$, $0.198 > 0.05$).

The findings indicated that autocratic leadership had a positive but insignificant impact on organizational performance. These findings partly confirm those determined by (Jony et al., 2019; Goyal, Kiran & Bose, 2023), where it was discovered that the leadership style was insignificantly related to organizational performance. The studies, however determined that

autocratic leadership style was also negatively influential on organizational performance, contrasting with this study's findings. This implies that the application of the leadership style could lead to varied outcomes in organizations, but its overall effect would be inconsequential to organizational performance. The findings partly contrasted with Teshome (2023) who determined autocratic leadership style as having a positive and significant effect on organizational performance. These findings suggest that the autocratic leadership style's positive effect could also translate to significant outcomes in organizational performance. The leadership style's effectiveness may be instrumental in contexts where performance requires quick decision-making and attainment of short-term goals (Sivaruban, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The study ascertained that the autocratic leadership style played a positive and insignificant role in the organizational performance of Five-Star Hotels in Kenya. The study concludes that autocratic leadership has a positive and insignificant effect on organizational performance. The application of the authoritative style of leadership did not have a long-lasting impact in improving organizational performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that autocratic leadership style be utilised sparingly in contexts where employees may benefit from increased oversight and close guidance as autocratic leadership style's overall impact on organizational performance was determined as not being considerable.

The study was restricted to autocratic leadership style which raises the need for further studies on other types of leadership styles such as the laissez-faire, servant-leadership and authentic leadership styles and their impact on organizational performance of establishment in the hospitality sector.

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