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EFFECT OF IDEALIZED INFLUENCE ON CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Public universities in Kenya experience frequent leadership transitions due to the contractual nature of top management positions, typically occurring every five years. These changes often introduce varying leadership styles and operational approaches, posing challenges for organizational stability and effective change management. This study assessed the effect of idealized influence, a key dimension of transformational leadership, on change management in public Universities in Kenya. The study is anchored on the Transformational-Transactional Theory and also draws from ADKAR change model, and Kotter's Eight Step Change Model to explore how leadership practices affect change management. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a study population comprising 669 staff members from Chuka University. A stratified random sampling technique yielded a sample of 215 respondents, and primary data was gathered using questionnaires. The findings from regression analysis indicated that idealized influence significantly and positively affects change management in public universities in Kenya. The study concluded that leaders who exhibit idealized influence through integrity, vision, and strong values are pivotal in facilitating successful organizational change. Consequently, public universities are encouraged to prioritize leadership development, focusing on idealized influence to enhance change management processes. Further research is suggested to explore the long-term effects of idealized influence on innovation, staff creativity, and overall organizational performance within the context of change management.

Keywords: *Idealized Influence, Transformational Leadership, Change Management*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of idealized influence, a key dimension of transformational leadership, refers to leaders who serve as role models by demonstrating high ethical standards, integrity, and a clear vision for the organization (Bass, 1985). Leaders who exhibit idealized influence inspire confidence and trust, making them crucial in steering organizations through periods of change. In the context of change management, the role of idealized influence is particularly significant in environments that experience frequent structural or leadership changes, such as public universities. Universities, as knowledge institutions, often grapple with changes in leadership, organizational restructuring, and external policy pressures, all of which demand effective change management to ensure continuity, sustainability, and growth.

In Europe, the landscape of public universities has been marked by significant reforms driven by globalization, technological advancements, and the demand for higher education quality. In countries like the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, public universities have faced ongoing changes due to shifts in funding models and governance structures (Stensaker et al., 2021). Research suggests that transformational leadership, particularly idealized influence, can play a key role in navigating these changes by promoting a culture of trust and collective identity. However, gaps exist in examining the long-term impact of such leadership on sustaining change beyond initial implementation, particularly in terms of academic innovation and adaptability (Marques & Alves, 2022). In the United States, universities face similar challenges, compounded by increasing political and economic pressures. Idealized influence in university leadership has been shown to foster a positive organizational culture that aids in change management (Keiser & Velez, 2022).

Nonetheless, most studies in the American context have focused on private institutions, leaving a gap in understanding how transformational leadership influences change in public universities where bureaucratic constraints may differ. In Asia, particularly in countries such as China, India, and Japan, the rapid expansion of higher education has necessitated transformational leadership to cope with structural changes. Leaders in Chinese universities, for example, have leveraged idealized influence to align institutional objectives with national educational reforms (Zhu et al., 2021). Yet, there is a research gap concerning how this leadership style can be sustained over time in managing resistance to change and balancing national policy with institutional autonomy.

Across Africa, public universities face a myriad of challenges, including underfunding, governance issues, and external political influence, making effective change management critical. In West Africa, studies in Nigeria have shown that transformational leadership, particularly idealized influence, has helped universities align with global academic standards, despite limited resources (Adedoyin & Fadare, 2022). However, there remains a lack of research on how this leadership dimension can foster long-term organizational change in the face of continual economic instability. In Southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, university reforms have been largely driven by post-apartheid policies aimed at decolonizing higher education. Leaders who exhibit idealized influence have been pivotal in managing these transitions, fostering a sense of unity and ethical governance within institutions (Zulu & Sebola, 2021). Nonetheless, studies indicate a need to explore how idealized influence can mitigate the growing tensions between institutional autonomy and governmental oversight.

Central and East African universities also face complex changes, often due to infrastructural and governance challenges. In Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania, transformational leadership has been shown to positively affect organizational resilience, but the role of idealized influence in these processes remains underexplored (Mwesigwa et al., 2021). The gap here lies in understanding how leaders can maintain trust and integrity in environments with limited resources and high levels of political interference. East Africa Context: In East Africa, countries like Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania have been undergoing higher education reforms to enhance the quality of university education and align with regional and global standards. In Uganda, transformational leadership has been instrumental in driving these changes, with leaders demonstrating idealized influence through strong ethical leadership and vision (Ssekamanya et al., 2021).

However, research gaps exist in assessing how this leadership dimension can address deeper systemic challenges, such as corruption and governance inefficiencies, which impede effective change management. In Rwanda, transformational leadership has been critical in aligning higher education with national development goals. Leaders who embody idealized influence have facilitated significant changes in educational policy and university governance (Nshimiyimana & Bizimana, 2022). Despite this progress, studies have yet to explore how these leadership qualities influence long-term academic and administrative reforms in the face of resource constraints and external pressures.

Kenyan public universities, including Chuka University, face unique challenges in change management due to frequent leadership transitions, funding shortages, and changing governmental policies. Idealized influence has been identified as an essential factor in ensuring smooth transitions and promoting a unified organizational vision (Njenga & Muli, 2022). However, gaps exist in understanding how this leadership quality can be institutionalized to withstand frequent leadership changes and ensure sustainable change management across diverse public universities.

While some research has explored the role of transformational leadership in Kenyan universities, there is a need for more focused studies on how idealized influence can drive long-term cultural and operational changes in these institutions, particularly in the context of public accountability and stakeholder engagement. The global, regional and local imperatives indicate the role of idealized influence in transformational leadership is recognized as crucial for navigating change management in public universities. However, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding the long-term impact of idealized influence on sustaining organizational change. Research was needed to explore how this leadership dimension can address deeper systemic issues such as complex change management landscapes that universities must navigate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory, first conceptualized by Burns (1978) and later developed by Bass (1985), provides a framework for understanding how leaders influence organizational change by inspiring and motivating followers through shared values and vision. A key element of this theory is idealized influence, wherein leaders serve as ethical role models, gaining the trust and respect of their followers. Studies have shown that transformational leadership, particularly idealized influence, has a significant positive impact on change management by fostering a sense of shared purpose and direction (Northouse, 2021). However, much of the existing literature focuses on corporate or private institutions, with limited exploration of how idealized influence operates in the context of public universities, particularly those in developing regions where leadership transitions are frequent and resource constraints are prevalent (Nguyen & Ngoc, 2021).

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

Another relevant theoretical framework in the context of this study is Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model, which outlines a systematic process for implementing organizational change. The model emphasizes the importance of leadership in guiding change, starting with creating a sense of urgency and establishing a vision for change (Kotter, 1996). Recent studies have integrated Kotter's model with transformational leadership theory, suggesting that idealized influence can be

a critical factor in maintaining the momentum of change initiatives by ensuring strong, value-driven leadership at every stage of the process (Peterson & Kozmetsky, 2022). Nevertheless, there is a research gap in the application of this combined theoretical approach in public university settings, especially in regions where leadership stability and governance issues complicate the change process.

ADKAR model of change management

Additionally, the ADKAR model of change management, which focuses on awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement, has been widely used to assess how individuals and organizations adapt to change. Transformational leaders, through idealized influence, are often pivotal in the awareness and desire stages of this model, as they inspire organizational members to recognize the need for change and align with the leader's vision (Hiatt, 2020). Despite its applicability, few studies have critically analyzed the role of idealized influence within the ADKAR framework, especially in academic institutions where organizational inertia and bureaucratic structures often pose significant barriers to change (Jankelová et al., 2023). This presents a notable gap in understanding how transformational leadership and change management models can be integrated to effectively manage change in complex institutional environments like public universities.

Empirical Literature Review

Idealized Influence and Change Management

Globally, research on transformational leadership and its impact on change management in universities has been extensive, particularly in developed regions like Europe and North America. Studies have highlighted that idealized influence, a key component of transformational leadership, fosters trust and commitment among staff, leading to smoother transitions during institutional change (Hussain et al., 2021). For instance, in American universities, idealized influence has been shown to help navigate complex organizational shifts, especially in response to digital transformations and policy reforms (Clark & McCarthy, 2020). However, most global studies focus on stable, resource-rich environments where leaders have ample support for change initiatives. There is a significant gap in understanding how idealized influence operates in universities that face frequent leadership changes, resource constraints, and more turbulent political climates, as seen in developing regions.

Regionally, within Africa, the role of idealized influence in public university settings has been explored in contexts such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana. Research shows that transformational leaders who exhibit idealized influence can overcome challenges like resource limitations and organizational resistance to change (Eze et al., 2022). However, African universities, particularly in West and Central Africa, often struggle with leadership instability, which complicates the successful implementation of change initiatives (Nzimande, 2021). Despite the relevance of these findings, there is limited research on how idealized influence affects change management in universities in East Africa. The few studies in the region, such as those from Uganda and Tanzania, emphasize leadership challenges but fail to specifically analyze the role of idealized influence in managing these changes.

In Kenya, empirical studies on transformational leadership in public universities have shown mixed results. While some research highlights that transformational leaders, through idealized influence, inspire staff commitment and promote smoother change transitions (Kiptoo & Sang, 2021), other studies suggest that frequent leadership changes, coupled with inadequate resources, hamper the effectiveness of such leadership styles (Mutuku, 2022). Despite the growing body of research on leadership and change management in Kenyan universities, there is a notable gap in focused empirical studies on how idealized influence, as part of transformational leadership, directly impacts change management in public universities, particularly in dynamic institutions like Chuka University, where leadership changes frequently.

The review of theoretical and empirical literature reveals several study gaps. Theoretical gaps exist in the integration of transformational leadership models, such as idealized influence, with change management frameworks like Kotter's and ADKAR, particularly within the context of public universities. While these models have been applied in corporate settings, their relevance to resource-constrained and leadership-unstable institutions, like public universities in developing regions, remains underexplored. Empirically, there is a lack of focused research on how idealized influence specifically impacts change management in public universities, especially in East Africa and Kenya. Existing studies in Africa largely examine leadership challenges broadly without isolating the effects of idealized influence during leadership transitions, leaving a gap in understanding its role in dynamic, often unstable university settings.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework visually links Idealized Influence as the key driver influencing various aspects of Change Management in public universities in Kenya.

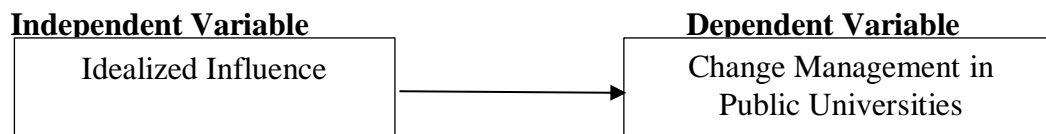


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to observe and accurately represent behaviors related to transformational leadership and change management without intervention. The design was suitable for capturing the relationships between variables in a way that could be generalized to a larger population. The research specifically targeted the 669 teaching and non-teaching staff at Chuka University, categorizing them into top management, middle-level managers, and operational staff. A stratified random sampling method was applied to ensure representation from all staff categories, resulting in a sample size of 250 participants calculated using the Yamane (1967) formula.

Data was collected via structured questionnaires organized into sections reflecting key dimensions of transformational leadership and change management. The questionnaires employed a Likert scale to capture the intensity of attitudes. Data analysis involved the use of SPSS Version 26,

beginning with descriptive statistics to summarize demographic data and key variables. Pearson's correlation was used to explore relationships between leadership aspects and change management, while a multiple regression model assessed the combined effects of leadership dimensions on change management. Results were presented using tables, charts, and graphs for clarity.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

This study's main focus was to examine the role of idealized influence as a component of transformational leadership in facilitating successful change management within organizations taking reference to public universities in Kenya. The study sought to understand how different aspects of idealized influence such as leaders' role modeling, trustworthiness, respect, ethical behavior, and teamwork impact the effectiveness of change management processes. By analyzing these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of how transformational leadership behaviors can enhance the capacity of organizations to implement and sustain change initiatives. The data displayed in Table 1 was generated through the administration of questionnaires to respondents.

Table 1: Effect of Idealized Influence on Change Management

Idealized Aspects	Responses in % n=215					Mean	SD
	No Extent	Little Extent	Moderate Extent	Great Extent	Very Great Extent		
Leaders are good role models	2.8	5.6	19.7	45.1	26.8	3.85	1.00
Leaders are trusted	4.2	7.0	22.5	43.7	22.5	3.72	1.01
Leaders are respected	1.4	4.2	16.9	39.4	38.0	4.08	0.92
Leaders are ethical	5.6	8.5	25.4	36.6	23.9	3.64	1.09
Leaders are team players	2.8	7.0	21.1	42.3	26.8	3.83	1.01

From the data, it can be seen that a significant proportion of respondents (45.1%) indicated that leaders act as role models to a "great extent," and an additional 26.8% reported this to a "very great extent," with a high overall mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.00. This suggests that most leaders were perceived as effective role models, although some variation in opinions exists.

Trust in leaders was also moderately high, with 43.7% of respondents affirming it to a "great extent" and 22.5% to a "very great extent." The mean score for trust (3.72, SD = 1.01) indicates that while the majority trust their leaders, there were some variability. Respect for leaders is one

of the highest-rated aspects, with 39.4% of respondents affirming respect to a "great extent" and 38% to a "very great extent." The overall mean for respect (4.08, SD = 0.92) is the highest among all the aspects, reflecting a strong consensus on this trait.

Ethical leadership was rated slightly lower compared to other aspects, with a mean of 3.64 (SD = 1.09). Still, 36.6% of respondents indicated that leaders are ethical to a "great extent," and 23.9% to a "very great extent." However, 5.6% felt that ethical behavior was not present at all, indicating some areas of concern. Leaders were viewed as team players by 42.3% of respondents to a "great extent" and by 26.8% to a "very great extent." The mean score of 3.83 (SD = 1.01) reflects strong support for this characteristic, with minimal variation.

The findings suggest that idealized influence is a critical factor in change management, as leaders are perceived positively across all key attributes, particularly as role models and respected figures. The relatively high means in all categories indicate that these leadership traits may contribute significantly to the success of change management initiatives. Similar results were found in a study by Bass and Avolio (1994), which highlighted that transformational leader, through their idealized influence, inspire trust, respect, and ethical behavior, thereby enhancing organizational change efforts. Additionally, Judge and Piccolo (2004) emphasize that ethical leadership and being a role model foster a supportive environment for change. The high levels of respect and trust identified in this study align with their conclusions, suggesting that fostering these qualities can lead to more effective change management outcomes.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficient between the change management idealized influence was computed to determine whether there was a positive or negative association between the constructs of transformational leadership. The results of analysis are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Correlation Analysis

Transformational Leadership Aspect	Change Management	
	Pearson's Correlation	p-value
Idealized influence	0.646	0.000

The results show that change management at public universities is positively and significantly correlated with idealized influence ($r=0.646$, $p<0.000$). The efficacy of change management rises with idealized influence (for instance, leaders being respected, trusted, and good role models). The p-value of 0.000 indicates the statistical significance of the result, indicating that the observed correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was applied to determine the strength and nature of the relationship. Table 3 presents the relevant statistical values from the regression analysis, showing how transformational leadership factors explain the variance in change management outcomes.

Table 3: Effect of Idealized Influence on Change Management

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	0.892	0.796	0.791		0.2874	
ANOVA						
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F		Sig.
Regression	68.254	4	17.064	206.398		0.000
Residual	17.346	210	0.083			
Total	85.6	214				
Coefficients						
Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	P-value	
(Constant)	0.182	0.098		1.857		
Idealized Influence	0.324	0.042	0.312	7.714	0.032	

Idealized Influence has a coefficient of 0.324, a p-value of 0.032, and a standard error of 0.042. This indicates that idealized influence and change management have a positive and significant relationship, with an improvement in change management of 0.324 units for every unit increase in idealized influence. The significance of this relationship is confirmed by the p-value, which is less than 0.05.

The findings regarding the relationship between idealized influence and change management have important implications for organizational leadership and development practices. The positive coefficient of 0.324 indicates that as idealized influence increases, change management improves correspondingly. Specifically, for every unit increase in idealized influence, there is an associated increase of 0.324 units in change management effectiveness. This suggests that enhancing leaders' capacity to exemplify idealized influence can lead to better outcomes in managing organizational change. The statistically significant p-value of 0.032 (less than the 0.05 threshold) reinforces the reliability of this relationship. It underscores the necessity for organizations to prioritize the development of transformational leadership qualities among their leaders. Training programs that cultivate skills related to role modeling, ethical behavior, trust-building, and team collaboration can significantly enhance change management efforts.

The findings further suggest that institutions aiming to implement effective change initiatives should consider incorporating strategies that leverage idealized influence. This could involve creating a leadership culture where leaders are encouraged to demonstrate the characteristics associated with idealized influence, thus fostering a supportive environment that facilitates change. The findings also imply that idealized influence not only enhances change management processes but may also contribute to overall organizational performance. Leaders who effectively embody these traits can inspire and motivate employees, leading to increased engagement and commitment,

which are crucial for successful change initiatives. These results align with transformational leadership theory, which posits that leaders who act as role models and inspire followers can achieve greater success in organizational transformation. The empirical validation of this relationship contributes to the body of knowledge in leadership studies, providing a basis for further research into effective leadership practices.

In summary, the findings highlight the importance of idealized influence as a critical component of effective change management and suggest that organizations should actively promote and develop these leadership traits to enhance their capacity for successful change.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant positive relationship between idealized influence and change management, demonstrating that leaders who embody idealized traits such as ethical behavior, trustworthiness, and role modeling can effectively enhance change initiatives within organizations. The results suggest that the presence of transformational leadership qualities fosters a supportive environment conducive to successful change management, thereby contributing to both organizational effectiveness and employee engagement. By confirming the theoretical underpinnings of transformational leadership, these findings offer valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that scholars should explore the mechanisms through which idealized influence impacts specific aspects of change management. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how these relationships evolve over time and across different organizational contexts. The findings encourage the integration of idealized influence into broader leadership theories. Future theoretical frameworks should consider the dynamic interplay between various leadership styles and their collective impact on organizational change.

Organizations should implement targeted leadership training that emphasizes the development of idealized influence traits. Workshops and mentorship programs focused on role modeling, trust-building, and ethical decision-making can enhance leaders' capacities to effectively guide change. Practitioners should incorporate assessments of idealized influence into leadership performance evaluations. Recognizing and rewarding leaders who exemplify these traits can encourage a culture of transformational leadership within the organization.

Organizations and institutions should establish policies that promote the selection and development of leaders who exhibit idealized influence characteristics. This may include revising hiring practices, creating leadership competency frameworks, and integrating idealized influence into succession planning. Policymakers should foster an organizational culture that values ethical leadership and team collaboration. Initiatives that encourage open communication, employee feedback, and participatory decision-making can reinforce the principles of idealized influence, ultimately leading to more successful change management outcomes.

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