

Influence of Project Manager's Soft Skills on Performance Of Non-Governmental Organizations Projects in Nakuru County, Kenya

Everlyne Bunusu Kakai

*Student, School of Business and Economics
Mount Kenya University, Kenya*

Dr. Ruthwinnie Munene

*Lecturer, School of Business and Economics
Mount Kenya University, Kenya*

Abstract: Project managers are critical to the design, development, and execution of a project. To do so, project managers must be well-versed in dealing with all stakeholders while assuring project success, which necessitates the acquisition of specialized skills. The skills of a project manager are important to the project's success. Despite this, soft skills and their impact on project performance are typically overlooked. As many NGOs shift towards a project-oriented strategy, it generates the need to understand the function of soft skills that a project manager possesses and how they effect project performance. Although various studies on the relevance of soft skills in project performance have been undertaken internationally, regionally, and locally, major analytical, methodological, and contextual inconsistencies have been observed, prompting a study to fill the gap. This study aimed to evaluate the influence of project leadership on project performance in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study used both descriptive and explanatory research designs, with stratified sampling to choose the projects for this investigation. A sample of 160 respondents was chosen, four of whom were included in the pilot study. Structured questionnaires were sent to respondents to help with data collection. SPSS, a statistical software, was used to analyze the data. The study found that project leadership was important determinants of project performance. Project leadership exhibited a strong positive link with project performance. The study found that effective implementation of these soft skills would be good drivers of project performance in Nakuru county NGOs. According to the report, project performance should be based not just on technical skills (hard skills), but also on boosting soft skills. The study only looked at NGOs in Nakuru County; analogous studies in other sectors, such as the public or private sector, should be done to determine and generalize the findings, as well as examine any variances.

Key Words: Project Leadership, Project Performance, Nakuru County

I. Introduction:

Any organization is it governmental of non-governmental needs to ensure that it sustains its existence by constantly improving on the performance of its projects. For a project to be successful, there are many factors that come into play. Cost and schedule are the main ways to measure whether a project is doing well. A successful project is one that is completed in time, within the stipulated period and estimated budget (Ali and Rahmat, 2019). Burke (2018) explains that project performance refers to when projects are completed successfully within the estimated budget and allocated time, realizing the agreed output that is acceptable by the client without changing the organization's corporate culture. Westland (2019) notes that several factors such as cost, time, stakeholder satisfaction, schedule and business performance can determine the general project performance. According to PMBOK (2019), projects are of great importance to organizations; they are the means by which different organizations conduct their initiatives, resource and acquire funding. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) projects contribute immensely to the overall development of all sectors across

Africa (Gitau, 2018). Tahir (2019) studied how the project Managers soft competencies impact the successful execution of projects in Kigali, Rwanda. He concluded that key project success should include soft skills such as exhibiting sensitivity, showing enthusiasm, authority delegation, coping with difficult decision and good decision making. Project managers need people skills including but not limited to good leadership skills, effective communication skills, excellent problem-solving skills, delegation and team building skills (Shi and Chen, 2019). The last three decades has seen a massive growth in the number of projects run by NGOs in Kenya and Africa at large (Radley, 2018) the number of projects within NGOs operating in Kenya, more specifically within the urban setup continues to increase (Achieng, 2019). According to the NGO Board report (2019), there are 539 NGOs that are currently registered, headquartered and operating in Nairobi City County. While the growth in both size and number of these projects within the NGO sector in the country is impressive their effectiveness in achieving their objectives is still wanting. Rather than developing a proactive approach in collaborating with governments and different stakeholders on their projects, many NGOs are responding to the damage and ills perpetrated by business practices that are unsustainable (Asfaw *et al*, 2017). Projects within the NGO sector have special characteristics and managing them would therefore require a specialist knowledge (Barna, 2018).

Many NGOs in Nakuru do programs in a variety of fields, including education, human rights, the environment, health, and refugees. These programs carry out high-impact activities that help to alleviate poverty and illiteracy among inhabitants, particularly in informal communities. A first informal examination of NGO initiatives around Nakuru County revealed that some are encountering a number of difficulties. For instance, Achieng (2019) indicates that Uwezo Foundation Africa whose mission is to provide social spaces and promote an enabling environment for the youth in informal settlements in Nakuru has been facing challenges. The performance of its project has been hindered by various factors such as poor political were embezzlement of funds by project managers, conflicts among the community.

II. Objectives of the Study:

The objective of the study is to analyze how a project manager's leadership skills, affect project performance in NGOs in Nakuru County, Kenya

III. Literature Review :

Project leadership has been emphasized in several studies as being crucial to project performance. The importance of leadership in the effective execution and implementation of projects has been noted and recorded by Kariuki (2019) and Kiihoh (2019). The influence of project manager leadership style, collaboration, and project characteristics on the performance of water projects in Kenya was examined by Kariuki (2021). Project files provided secondary data, while a cross-sectional descriptive study approach was used to gather primary data from project managers.

The study concluded that project performance is to a large extent impacted by the kind of leadership style exhibited by the project lead and the integration of team management. However, data was collected from project managers long after the projects were completed, some respondents could not recall all the details. Qualitative measure was also not considered in this study; this could have given different results; only time and cost were taken into account (Kariuki, 2021)

Kissi *et al*'s (2019) study, which examined the impact of a project manager's transformational leadership style on project performance in Rwanda, was in line with Kariuki's findings. To gather information, the researcher employed questionnaires with a sample size of 350 project managers. Project performance and the transformational leadership trait of project managers were shown to be correlated. Project managers provided the sole data utilized in this study; project team members' opinions were not included. This raised the possibility of a shared data source tainting the study's conclusions.

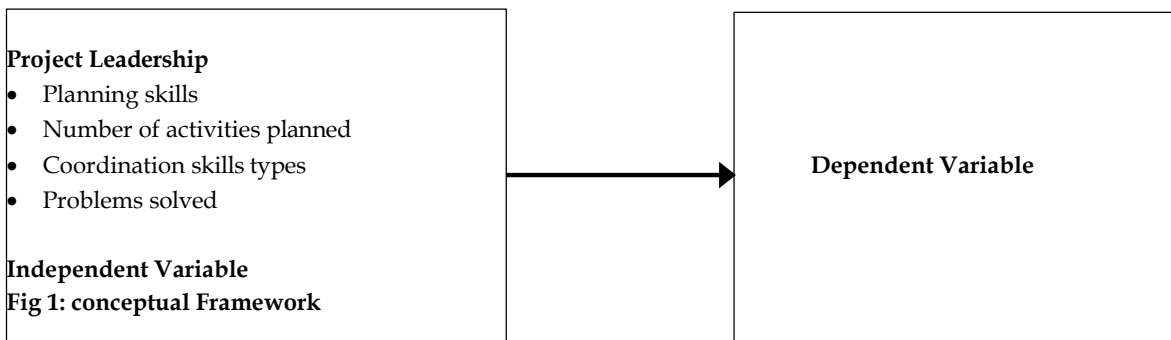
Project management leadership and its impact on the success of Fintech initiatives in Kenya were examined by Kiihoh (2021). Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used, along with a descriptive design. A questionnaire was used to engage a target group of 100 people, which included consultants, project managers, senior managers, and members of the project team. The study's conclusions showed a strong correlation between IT project performance and project management leadership characteristics.

Since a project manager must guide a varied group of team members with less direct supervision, Kiihoh (2021) asserts that a project manager should possess some strong leadership abilities. According to Kiihoh (2021), effective project performance is a consequence of the leadership style of many stakeholders. For projects to be completed successfully, project leadership is seen to be extremely important. Four components of project leadership were described in an analysis by Nziva (2018) on the subject and how it affects the way Compassion International projects in Kitui County are carried

out. A descriptive design was employed, with a sample size of 115 and a population of 180 respondents. Nziva discovered that project performance was positively impacted by leadership qualities.

Nziva (2018) contends that a project's size often determines the leadership position; the smaller the project, the less significant the leadership style, and vice versa. As a result, highly effective leadership abilities are more important for a project manager than management abilities. However, the conclusions of this study were limited in their generalizability because it was based on a single NGO.

Another study by Ahmed (2018) on leadership abilities impacting projects in organizations in the United Kingdom employed secondary data, with several published publications and journals being evaluated. The findings revealed a correlation between transformational leadership and project team members' levels of satisfaction. This researcher only employed secondary data sources; primary data would provide firsthand knowledge and application. The environment in which this study was conducted differs greatly from the one in which the current study is conducted, making it impossible to generalize the findings.



IV. Research Methodology :

Research designs do not exist in isolation; combining many designs in a research is advised to increase the study's validity (Ridder, 2017). The study employed descriptive search methods. Descriptive design, on the other hand, captures the features of the target population and allows the study to evaluate its hypothesis (Cooper & Schindler, 2018). Variables cannot be manipulated in this design since the individual conducting the study has no influence over the specified variables.

A target population of 52 projects in Nakuru County was selected. These programs are divided into the following categories: health, relief, social justice, education, economic empowerment, and environment (Thairu, 2021). The table below is a summary of how the various sectors are distributed.

For each of It was not feasible to analyze all projects in the 52 NGOs, thus the study used a stratified random sample approach to choose respondents. Projects were chosen from the several strata , namely: Health, Environment, Education, Social Justice, Relief, and Economic Empowerment, resulting in a sample size of 26 projects, representing 50% of the target population.

To provide for a diversity of replies from participants, 50 questionnaires including a combination of open-ended and closed questions were sent. The pilot testing was conducted in Kericho County in three projects, with questionnaires distributed to six respondents, two project managers, and two project team members.

The data collected was both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data was summarized and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The researcher used the computer spreadsheet Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data.

The following model was adopted:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \epsilon$$

In this case:

Y=Project Performance

β_0 = Constant

X_1 = Project Leadership

V. Findings

This section outlines the descriptive and inferential findings of the study.

5.1 Descriptive Findings of the Study

Table 1: Project Leadership

| Statement | Mean | Std. Dev. | 1(CD) | 2(NA) | 3(N) | 4(A) | 5(SA) |
|---|-------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| During the project design phase, a project manager leads and mentors his team in creating suitable standards. | 3.730 | 1.447 | 9.46% | 12.94% | 22.86% | 18.43% | 36.40% |
| Within the project team, project leadership facilitates planning, organizing, assigning, and delegating tasks. | 3.661 | 1.427 | 10.53% | 16.21% | 19.14% | 22.74% | 31.37% |
| The project manager makes sure that a backup plan is in place to handle any risks that may arise throughout the project's life cycle. | 3.578 | 1.424 | 13.39% | 15.67% | 14.83% | 13.95% | 42.17% |
| In order to improve project performance, the project leader keeps an eye on the whole project cycle and implements an action plan for the team. | 3.680 | 1.460 | 11.35% | 14.83% | 18.27% | 20.58% | 34.97% |
| Effective communication between various stakeholders is established and maintained by project leadership. | 3.548 | 1.128 | 5.32% | 13.23% | 24.62% | 26.06% | 26.78% |
| Aggregate | 3.59 | 1.376 | | | | | |

Source: Field Data (2025)

According to table 6 above, the majority of respondents agreed that a project manager led and guided the team in creating appropriate standards during the project design phase (M = 3.73, SD = 1.46); that project leadership helped with planning, organizing, and task delegation within the team (M = 3.661, SD = 1.427); that a project leader made sure a backup plan for risk management was established (M = 3.578, SD = 1.424); that a project manager kept an eye on the entire project cycle and provided the team with an action plan (M = 3.548, SD = 1.128); and that the project leadership established and maintained effective communication among various stakeholders (M = 3.59, SD = 1.376).

Respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the project leadership statements, with an overall mean score of 3.59. These findings aligned with several other investigations. These results were in line with those of a research by Nziva (2018) that looked at how leadership affected project performance in Kenyan international organizations. The findings also aligned with Kissi et al. (2021), who found a favorable correlation between project performance and the leadership style of project managers.

Table 2:Project Performance

| | Mean | Std. Dev. | 1 (CD) | 2 (NA) | 3 (N) | 4 (A) | 5 (SA) |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Every job is finished and delivered by the deadline. | 2.850 | 1.288 | 11.07% | 26.50% | 30.78% | 16.71% | 14.95% |
| Completed projects have made use of the allocated funds and resources. | 3.496 | 1.260 | 10.51% | 19.71% | 17.11% | 25.16% | 27.52% |
| Projects that are finished are of the necessary caliber. | 3.312 | 1.287 | 12.67% | 20.42% | 15.39% | 27.06% | 25.46% |
| Aggregate | 3.226 | 1.332 | | | | | |

Source: Field Data (2021)

According to Table 10 above, some respondents (M=2.850, SD=1.288) concurred that all projects are finished and delivered on schedule. The remaining respondents disagreed or expressed a neutral opinion, suggesting that not all projects are completed in the allotted time. Certain projects took longer to complete than they had originally projected, particularly because of COVID-19 pandemic constraints that caused delays in project execution. The majority of respondents concurred that finished projects are of the necessary quality (M=3.312, SD =1.287) and that they were completed using the allocated money (M=3.496, SD =1.260).

According to the results above, the overall mean of 3.226 shows that some respondents agreed with the project performance statements while others disagreed. In addition to the completion date, over half of the participants concurred that projects used the budget allotted and produced high-quality results. Karuranga and Mulyungi (2023) contend that when project managers work to improve the likelihood of successful performance, their findings supported their claims. In order to assess performance, they also paid attention to the allotted budget, time, and final product quality. Karuranga and Mulyungi outlined in their projects how project managers could enhance their technical proficiency while also remembering the importance of soft skills, which are frequently disregarded by most firms.

5.2 Regression Analysis

Table 3:Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .862 ^a | .743 | .761 | .41745 | .760 | 106.361 | 4 | 134 | .000 |

Source: Filed Data (2021)

According to the findings, the regression of the independent factors and the dependent variable has a sufficient goodness of fit metric. According to the model's modified R square of 0.743, the predictors of project leadership explain 74.3% of the variance in NGOs' project success. This suggests further that a shift in project performance predictors has a significant favorable impact on project performance. A p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 and indicates significance, further supports this.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 114.913 | 1 | 27.479 | 106.371 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 34.879 | 40 | .267 | | |

| | | |
|--------------|----------------|-----------|
| Total | 149.791 | 41 |
|--------------|----------------|-----------|

Source: Field Data (2021)

According to Table 4, there is statistical significance in the regression model. This suggests a positive effect of project leadership on project success (F=106.37, p=0.000). This demonstrates how well the model forecasts and predicts how a project manager's soft skills affect the success of projects in NGOs in Nakuru County. The fact that the p value is 0.000, which is below the permissible critical threshold of 0.05, further supports this.

Table 5 : Coefficient of the Regression Model

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| | (Constant) | .015 | .179 | | | .101 | .085 |
| 1 Project Leadership | .087 | .072 | | 1.224 | .224 | -.054 | .227 |

Source: Field Data (2025)

Project performance in Nakuru County's NGO sector will improve if a project manager has more soft skills in project leadership, according to the table above, which holds all independent variables constant. There were other investigations that supported these findings. According to Karuranga and Mulyungi (2020), a project manager's capacity to establish a cohesive team, communicate well, and oversee project performance are all significantly correlated.

5.3 Qualitative Results

Project leadership was asked to be mentioned in other ways that affected project performance. In addition, respondents were asked what type of team-building procedures or frameworks had been implemented in their project. Additionally, they were to discuss other strategies for improving project performance. Among the important abilities a project manager should process for improved project performance were pre-planning, effective time management, strategic thinking, and regular monitoring and assessment, according to the research.

VI. Conclusion

It was concluded that project performance could not be significantly predicted by project leadership. This suggested that in order to enhance project performance, NGOs shouldn't mainly depend on a project manager's leadership abilities. According to the study's findings, NGOs in Nakuru County would see improved project performance if these soft skills were successfully adopted.

Recommendations

The development of soft skills, or people skills, should be prioritized in addition to technical abilities, or hard skills, which are necessary for project performance. Given the importance of project leadership in predicting project performance, the study suggested implementing strategies to improve project performance.

References

[1.] Achieng, J. (2019). *Challenges affecting project performance among non-governmental organizations in Nakuru County, Kenya*. Nairobi Publishers.

[2.] Ahmed, R. (2018). Leadership skills influencing project implementation in organizations in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Project Leadership*, 6(2), 45-58.

[3.] Ali, M., & Rahmat, N. (2019). Project performance measurement and success factors in organizations. *International Journal of Project Management*, 12(3), 77-89.

[4.] Asfaw, T., Mwangi, P., & Njoroge, S. (2017). Sustainability practices and NGO project performance in Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies*, 9(1), 34-49.

[5.] Barna, L. (2018). Specialized knowledge in management of NGO projects. *Journal of International Development Studies*, 5(4), 91-103.

[6.] Burke, R. (2018). *Project management: Planning and control techniques* (6th ed.). Wiley.

[7.] Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2018). *Business research methods* (13th ed.). McGraw- Hill Education.

- [8.] Gitau, M. (2018). Contribution of non-governmental organizations to socio-economic development in Africa. *African Development Review*, 10(2), 55-70.
- [9.] Karuranga, E., & Mulyungi, P. (2020). Project managers' soft skills and project performance in Rwanda. *International Journal of Project Organization and Management*, 8(1), 66-80.
- [10.] Karuranga, E., & Mulyungi, P. (2023). Project performance evaluation based on budget, time, and quality outcomes. *East African Journal of Project Management*, 11(2), 22-38.
- [11.] Kariuki, J. (2019). Leadership and project implementation in Kenya. *Kenya Journal of Management Studies*, 7(3), 41-56.
- [12.] Kariuki, J. (2021). Influence of project manager leadership style, collaboration, and project characteristics on performance of water projects in Kenya. *International Journal of Project Planning and Management*, 9(2), 73-88.
- [13.] Kiioh, P. (2019). Project leadership and organizational performance in Kenya. *Journal of Leadership and Governance*, 4(1), 28-39.
- [14.] Kiioh, P. (2021). Project management leadership and performance of fintech projects in Kenya. *African Journal of Information Systems*, 13(2), 101-117.
- [15.] Kissi, E., Dainty, A., & Tuuli, M. (2019). Transformational leadership of project managers and project performance in Rwanda. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 12(1), 201-218.
- [16.] Kissi, E., Dainty, A., & Tuuli, M. (2021). Leadership style and project performance among project managers. *Project Management Journal*, 52(3), 210-225.
- [17.] NGO Coordination Board. (2019). *Annual NGO sector report in Kenya*. Government Printer.
- [18.] Nziva, M. (2018). Leadership and implementation of Compassion International projects in Kitui County, Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Information Sciences and Project Management*, 3(2), 120-135.
- [19.] PMBOK Guide. (2019). *A guide to the project management body of knowledge* (6th ed.). Project Management Institute.
- [20.] Radley, B. (2018). Growth of NGO projects in Africa and emerging management challenges. *Development in Practice*, 28(5), 612-624.
- [21.] Ridder, H.-G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research*, 10(2), 281-305.
- [22.] Shi, Q., & Chen, J. (2019). People skills and project success among project managers. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 145(6), 1-11.
- [23.] Tahir, A. (2019). Project managers' soft competencies and successful project execution in Kigali, Rwanda. *Rwanda Journal of Management*, 4(1), 15-29.
- [24.] Thairu, P. (2021). Distribution of NGO projects in Nakuru County by sector. *Kenya Development Review*, 14(2), 88-97.
- [25.] Westland, J. (2019). *The project management life cycle: A complete step-by-step methodology for initiating, planning, executing, and closing a project successfully*. Kogan Page.