Journal of
Business and Strategic
Management
(JBSM)

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Journal of Business and Strategic Management
ISSN: 2520-0402 (online)
Vol. 11, Issue No. 6, pp. 66 - 78, 2026 www.carijournals.org

Effect of Strategic Direction Practices on Organizational Performance of Energy Companies in Kenya

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Accepted: 4th July, 2026, Received in Revised Form: 24th July, 2026, Published: 9th Aug, 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance among selected energy companies in Kenya.

Methodology: The study was anchored on the Upper Echelons Theory, which posits that organizational outcomes are largely influenced by the strategic decisions and characteristics of top management. An explanatory cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The target population comprised 189 management staff drawn from seven selected energy companies in Kenya, from which a sample of 128 respondents was determined using the Yamane sampling formula. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, whose reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.713$). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while simple linear regression analysis was employed to examine the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance.

Findings: With response rate of 80.4%, the findings revealed that strategic direction practices had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.452$, $p = .001$). The study further established that although the energy companies had clearly articulated organizational visions and missions, they exhibited weaknesses in regular review of strategic objectives, formal strategic planning processes, evidence-based strategic decision-making, and employee involvement in strategic direction.

Unique Contribution to Theory Practice and Policy: For sustainability in dynamic, uncertain and competitive business environment, energy companies in Kenya should prioritize strategic choices and practices aimed at positive outcomes and aligned to company visions. The study therefore, recommends that energy companies strengthen strategic planning processes, institutionalize periodic review of strategic objectives, promote evidence-based strategic choices to enhance their performance and competitiveness.

Keywords: *Strategic Direction Practices, Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance*

Introduction

Organizational performance remains one of the most important indicators of organizational success in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous business environment. Organizations across the world are increasingly confronted with rapid technological advancements, globalization, changing customer expectations, environmental uncertainties, and intense market competition, all of which require strategic responses to sustain competitiveness and long-term performance. Consequently, strategic leadership has attracted considerable scholarly attention because it enables organizational leaders to formulate strategic priorities, align organizational resources, and guide organizations towards achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Singh et al., 2023; Kiende & Muthimi, 2024).

Strategic direction is widely acknowledged as one of the most fundamental dimensions of strategic leadership. It encompasses the formulation and communication of an organization's vision, mission, strategic objectives, and long-term priorities that provide guidance for organizational decision-making and resource allocation. An effective strategic direction creates a shared organizational purpose, enhances strategic alignment across organizational units, facilitates effective resource utilization, and improves organizational responsiveness to environmental changes. Consequently, organizations that establish and communicate a clear strategic direction are more likely to achieve superior organizational performance through improved operational efficiency, innovation, employee commitment, and strategic adaptability (Jiaoli Cai, 2023).

Globally, organizations have increasingly adopted strategic direction practices to respond to growing environmental uncertainty and competitive pressures. Modern organizations are shifting from traditional administrative leadership towards strategic leadership that emphasizes long-term organizational sustainability, strategic agility, and value creation. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that organizations with clearly defined strategic direction consistently outperform those characterized by weak strategic orientation because strategic direction enhances organizational alignment, decision quality, innovation capability, and overall organizational effectiveness (Muchiri & Muathe, 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

Within Africa, organizations continue to operate in environments characterized by economic volatility, institutional reforms, technological transformation, infrastructure challenges, and increasing regional and global competition. These environmental dynamics have increased the need for organizational leaders to establish strategic direction capable of enhancing organizational resilience and sustainable performance. The energy sector has particularly experienced significant transformation owing to increased investment in renewable energy technologies, policy reforms, regional power integration, and expanding electricity access. These developments require organizational leaders to formulate clear strategic priorities that facilitate organizational adaptability while maintaining operational efficiency. Although studies conducted across African organizations generally report positive relationships between strategic leadership and organizational performance, findings remain context-specific due to differences in institutional environments, governance structures, and industry characteristics, thereby necessitating country-specific empirical investigations (Singh et al., 2023).

In Kenya, the energy sector plays a strategic role in supporting economic growth, industrialization, manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, and the country's transition towards sustainable development. The sector has undergone significant reforms aimed at increasing electricity access, expanding renewable energy generation, strengthening institutional governance, and improving operational efficiency. Despite these reforms, organizational performance among energy companies has remained inconsistent. While some organizations have reported improvements in profitability, operational efficiency, and revenue growth, others continue to experience declining financial performance and operational inefficiencies. These disparities suggest that organizational performance may be influenced not only by external environmental factors but also by internal strategic management practices, particularly strategic direction.

Recent empirical studies in Kenya have consistently demonstrated that strategic direction contributes positively to organizational performance across different sectors. For instance, Ngaruiya et al. (2023) established that strategic direction significantly improved the organizational performance of pharmaceutical companies through effective vision, mission, and strategic goal formulation. Similarly, Lerai et al. (2023) found that strategic direction positively influenced the performance of commercial-based state corporations by enhancing strategic planning, decision-making, and employee involvement. More recently, Abeid et al. (2025) reported that strategic direction significantly explained variations in the performance of Kenyan public universities, emphasizing stakeholder involvement, strategic communication, and environmental assessment as critical determinants of organizational success.

Despite the growing body of literature, important knowledge gaps remain. Most previous studies have examined strategic leadership as a broad multidimensional construct without isolating strategic direction as an independent strategic leadership practice. Furthermore, existing Kenyan studies have predominantly focused on sectors such as education, pharmaceuticals, commercial state corporations, banking, and manufacturing, with limited empirical attention given to the energy sector despite its strategic importance to national development (Lerai et al., 2023; Muchiri & Muathe, 2024). The operational complexity, regulatory environment, capital-intensive nature, and strategic significance of energy companies present unique leadership challenges that warrant sector-specific investigation.

The inconsistent organizational performance reported among Kenyan energy companies, coupled with the limited empirical evidence on strategic direction practices within the sector, presents both a practical and theoretical research gap. Understanding the extent to which strategic direction practices influence organizational performance is essential for strengthening strategic leadership, enhancing organizational effectiveness, and informing managerial practice and policy formulation within Kenya's energy sector. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance of energy companies in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Upper Echelons Theory (UET), developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) to explain how organizational outcomes are shaped by the characteristics and strategic decisions of top executives. The theory posits that organizations are reflections of their top managers because strategic choices are influenced by executives' cognitive bases, values, experiences, educational backgrounds, and perceptions of the external environment (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Since strategic leaders cannot process every aspect of the complex business environment objectively, they interpret organizational challenges through their personal experiences and managerial judgment, which subsequently influence strategic decisions and organizational outcomes. The theory shifted strategic management research from viewing organizational performance as solely determined by external environmental factors to recognizing the central role of top management in shaping organizational success. Hambrick (2007) further refined the theory by emphasizing that executive discretion and contextual factors influence the extent to which top managers affect organizational performance.

Upper Echelons Theory is particularly relevant to strategic leadership because it recognizes senior executives as the primary architects of organizational strategy. Strategic direction, which comprises the formulation of organizational vision, mission, long-term objectives, strategic priorities, and resource allocation decisions, originates largely from top management teams. The theory argues that these strategic decisions are not random but are products of executives' cognitive capabilities and strategic judgment (Hambrick, 2007). Consequently, organizations led by executives capable of developing clear strategic direction are more likely to align organizational resources with long-term objectives, improve strategic coordination, and enhance organizational adaptability in dynamic business environments. Recent reviews continue to affirm the relevance of Upper Echelons Theory in explaining how executive decision-making influences strategic choices and organizational performance across diverse organizational contexts (Abatecola & Cristofaro, 2020).

The theory is particularly applicable to Kenya's energy sector, where organizations operate in a highly regulated, capital-intensive, and technologically dynamic environment. Senior executives in energy companies are responsible for making strategic decisions concerning long-term investments, infrastructure development, technological innovation, regulatory compliance, and organizational sustainability. The quality of these strategic decisions largely depends on the leaders' ability to formulate and communicate a clear strategic direction capable of guiding organizational actions under conditions of uncertainty. Variations in organizational performance among Kenyan energy companies may therefore be explained, in part, by differences in how senior executives develop and implement strategic direction practices.

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Literature Review

Strategic direction has increasingly been recognized as a critical strategic leadership practice that enhances organizational performance by providing a clear organizational vision, mission, strategic priorities, and long-term objectives. Organizations with well-defined strategic direction are better positioned to align organizational resources, improve strategic decision-making, strengthen employee commitment, and respond effectively to changing business environments. Recent empirical evidence consistently supports the positive influence of strategic direction on organizational performance across different organizational and institutional contexts, although the magnitude of this relationship varies depending on industry characteristics and organizational settings.

Globally, strategic direction significantly contributes to organizational competitiveness and sustainable performance. Singh et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of strategic leadership research and concluded that organizations led by executives who formulate and communicate clear strategic direction exhibit superior organizational adaptability, innovation capability, and long-term performance. The review further established that strategic direction strengthens organizational resilience by aligning strategic objectives with organizational capabilities and external environmental changes. Similarly, Kiende and Muthimi (2024), in an empirical study of dairy processing firms in using strategic leadership dimensions grounded in international strategic management literature, found that strategic leadership practices centred on strategic direction significantly enhanced organizational performance by improving strategic alignment, operational efficiency, and managerial decision-making.

In Africa, empirical evidence demonstrates the importance of strategic direction in improving organizational performance. Studies conducted across African organizations indicate that organizations with clearly articulated vision, mission, strategic goals, and effective communication systems achieve better organizational outcomes than organizations characterized by weak strategic planning processes (Murugi & Mugwe, 2023; Ncede, 2023). For example, Reyes (2025) examined strategic leadership practices in public institutions reported that strategic direction strengthened organizational effectiveness by improving strategic coordination, stakeholder engagement, and implementation of organizational priorities. These findings suggest that strategic direction enables organizations operating in dynamic institutional environments to remain competitive despite economic uncertainty and governance challenges. However, the studies also indicate that contextual factors such as organizational structure, governance systems, and industry dynamics influence the strength of this relationship, thereby highlighting the need for sector-specific investigations.

Empirical evidence from Kenya consistently reports a positive relationship between strategic direction and organizational performance. Ngaruiya et al. (2023) investigated the influence of strategic direction on the organizational performance of pharmaceutical companies in Kenya using data collected from senior managers across local, generic, and multinational pharmaceutical firms. The study established that strategic direction, operationalized through organizational vision, mission, and strategic goals, significantly predicted organizational performance measured using profitability, customer perspective, and learning and growth. The findings demonstrated that organizations with stronger strategic direction recorded superior organizational performance, emphasizing the importance of executive leadership in guiding organizational strategy.

Similarly, Lerai (2023) examined the influence of strategic direction on the organizational performance of commercial-based state corporations in Kenya. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study established a strong positive relationship between strategic direction and organizational performance. Specifically, organizations characterized by participatory decision-making, innovation support, and effective communication of strategic priorities reported higher organizational performance than organizations exhibiting weak strategic alignment. The authors concluded that strategic direction enhances organizational effectiveness by facilitating coordinated decision-making and improving alignment between organizational resources and strategic objectives.

Muchiri et al. (2024) investigated the influence of strategic direction on the performance of public corporations in Kenya using the Agricultural Finance Corporation as a case study. The study found that clearly defined strategic direction significantly improved financial performance, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction through enhanced strategic communication and organizational alignment. The authors recommended that public organizations strengthen strategic communication mechanisms to ensure employees understand and implement organizational strategic priorities effectively. Comparable findings were reported by Abeid et al. (2025), who examined the relationship between strategic direction and the performance of public universities in Kenya. The study established that strategic direction practices including stakeholder involvement, strategic communication, environmental analysis, and organizational vision explained a substantial proportion of variation in university performance. The study concluded that effective strategic direction enhances institutional effectiveness by strengthening organizational planning, decision-making, and stakeholder commitment toward organizational objectives.

Empirical evidence consistently supports a positive association between strategic direction practices and organizational performance across different organizational contexts. Organizations with clear vision, mission, strategic objectives, stakeholder involvement, and effective strategic communication generally report superior organizational performance compared with organizations lacking strategic direction. Nevertheless, most recent empirical studies have concentrated on sectors such as education, pharmaceutical manufacturing, commercial state corporations, hospitality, and public organizations, with limited attention devoted to Kenya's energy sector. The energy sector operates within a unique environment characterized by substantial capital investment, technological complexity, regulatory oversight, and strategic national importance. Consequently, evidence generated from other sectors cannot be readily generalized to energy companies. This contextual gap justifies the present study, which seeks to examine the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance of energy companies in Kenya.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy and an explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. The positivist paradigm was considered appropriate because it facilitates objective measurement of variables and enables hypothesis testing using quantitative data (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The explanatory survey design was suitable for examining the causal relationship between strategic direction practices and organizational performance.

The target population comprised 189 management employees drawn from the headquarters of seven selected energy companies operating in Kenya. These included the Kenya Pipeline Company (KPC), Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen), Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), Kenya Electricity Transmission Company (KETRACO), Geothermal Development Company (GDC), National Oil Corporation of Kenya (NOCK), and Kenya Petroleum Refineries Limited (KPRL). Management staff were selected because they are directly involved in strategic planning, implementation, and organizational decision-making, making them the most appropriate respondents for the study.

The sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, yielding a sample of 128 respondents. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of management staff from each of the seven energy companies, after which simple random sampling was used to select respondents within each stratum.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and study variables. Inferential analysis was conducted using simple linear regression to determine the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance.

Findings

Response Rate

A total of 128 questionnaires were distributed to management staff drawn from the seven selected energy companies in Kenya. Of these, 103 completed questionnaires were returned and found suitable for analysis, representing a response rate of 80.4%. The remaining 25 questionnaires (19.6%) were either not returned or were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis.

The achieved response rate was considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalization of the study findings.

Table 1 Response Rate

Response	Frequency	%
Actual and Full Response	103	80.4
Non-Response	25	19.6
Total	**128**	**100.0**

Source: ***Research Data (2025)***

Descriptive Statistics for Strategic Direction Practices

The descriptive statistics for strategic direction practices are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Statement	Mean	SD
The company is clear about its vision, mission, and objectives, which has helped achieve organizational goals.	4.199	0.611
Organizational objectives are reviewed regularly when necessary.	2.187	0.701
Management makes clear, evidence-based strategic decisions regarding the organization's future direction.	2.165	0.699
The organization has a clear and formal strategic planning process.	2.109	0.723
Employees are empowered to participate in strategic direction decision-making.	2.176	0.717
Overall Mean	**2.567**	**0.690**

Source: ***Research Data (2025)***

The findings indicate that respondents strongly agreed that their organizations had clearly articulated visions, missions, and objectives (M = 4.199, SD = 0.611), suggesting that the energy companies had established strategic intent. However, respondents expressed relatively low levels of agreement regarding the regular review of strategic objectives (M = 2.187, SD = 0.701), evidence-based strategic decision-making (M = 2.165, SD = 0.699), the existence of formal strategic planning processes (M = 2.109, SD = 0.723), and employee participation in strategic decision-making (M = 2.176, SD = 0.717).

The strategic direction construct recorded a mean score of 2.567 (SD = 0.690), indicating that although the surveyed energy companies had established organizational vision and mission statements, several critical strategic direction practices—including strategic planning, periodic review of objectives, participatory decision-making, and evidence-based strategic management—

were implemented to a relatively limited extent. These findings suggest opportunities for strengthening strategic direction practices to support improved organizational performance.

Effect of Strategic Direction Practices on Organizational Performance

To determine the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance, a simple linear regression analysis was performed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Results

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	p-value
Constant	0.423	0.045	–	9.410	< .001
Strategic Direction Practices	0.471	0.105	0.452	4.486	< .001*

Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

Significant at p < .01.

Source: Research Data (2025).

The regression results indicate that strategic direction practices had a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.452$, $B = 0.471$, $t = 4.486$, $p < .001$). This indicates that improvements in strategic direction practices were associated with corresponding improvements in organizational performance among the selected energy companies in Kenya. Specifically, a one-unit increase in strategic direction practices was associated with an estimated 0.471-unit increase in organizational performance, holding other factors constant.

The findings support the study objective and provide empirical evidence that organisations with clearly articulated strategic direction practices, including a shared vision, strategic planning, and effective strategic decision-making, are more likely to achieve superior organisational performance. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.452$) indicates a moderately strong positive influence of strategic direction practices on organisational performance. Consequently, the null hypothesis that strategic direction practices have no statistically significant effect on organizational performance is rejected.

Discussion

The findings of this study established that strategic direction practices have a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance among selected energy companies in Kenya. The results imply that organizations with clearly articulated strategic direction are more likely to achieve superior organizational performance by aligning organizational goals, guiding strategic decision-making, and ensuring efficient allocation of resources. Strategic direction provides a roadmap that enables organizations to respond proactively to environmental changes while maintaining focus on long-term objectives.

The findings support the Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), which argues that organizational outcomes are largely influenced by the strategic decisions and cognitive orientations of top management. In the context of the energy sector, senior managers who effectively communicate organizational vision, formulate strategic objectives, and provide clear strategic direction are more likely to enhance organizational performance. Consequently, the findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that strategic leadership decisions constitute a critical determinant of organizational success.

The results are consistent with recent empirical studies. Ali and Anwar (2021) found that strategic leadership capabilities significantly improved organizational effectiveness among small and medium-sized enterprises in Iraq. Similarly, Ojogiwa (2021) reported that organizations characterized by clear strategic vision, well-defined objectives, and participatory strategic direction achieved significantly higher organizational performance within Nigeria's service sector. Likewise, Mui et al. (2023) established that strategic direction and strategic vision positively influenced organizational performance among Malaysian firms, although the magnitude of the relationship varied across organizations. These findings collectively suggest that organizations with effective strategic direction practices are better positioned to achieve sustainable performance.

The descriptive findings of the present study further revealed that although the sampled energy companies had clearly articulated organizational vision and mission statements, respondents reported relatively low levels of employee participation in strategic decision-making, infrequent review of strategic objectives, and limited implementation of formal strategic planning processes. These findings indicate that while organizations have invested in developing strategic intent, greater emphasis is needed on strategy implementation and continuous strategic review. Effective strategic direction extends beyond the formulation of organizational vision and mission to include regular evaluation of strategic objectives, evidence-based decision-making, and inclusive participation of employees in strategic processes.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that energy companies should strengthen strategic planning systems by institutionalizing periodic review of organizational objectives, promoting evidence-based strategic decision-making, and enhancing employee involvement in strategy formulation and implementation. Such initiatives are likely to improve organizational adaptability, strengthen strategic alignment, and ultimately enhance organizational performance.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of strategic direction practices on organizational performance among selected energy companies in Kenya. The findings established that strategic direction practices have a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance. Organizations that provide clear strategic direction through well-defined vision and mission statements, strategic planning, evidence-based decision-making, and effective communication of organizational goals are more likely to achieve improved performance outcomes.

Although the findings revealed that the participating energy companies had clearly articulated organizational visions and missions, weaknesses were observed in the implementation of strategic direction practices, particularly in the regular review of strategic objectives, formal strategic planning processes, evidence-based decision-making, and employee involvement in strategic decisions. These shortcomings suggest that while strategic intent exists, greater attention is required to strengthen strategy implementation and execution.

The study concludes that effective strategic direction is a critical strategic leadership practice that enhances organizational performance within Kenya's energy sector. Accordingly, energy companies should strengthen strategic planning processes, institutionalize periodic review of strategic objectives, and promote participatory and evidence-based decision-making to improve organizational performance. Furthermore, the study extends the application of the Upper Echelons Theory by demonstrating that strategic decisions made by top management significantly influence organizational outcomes in the Kenyan energy sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that;

Strengthen strategic planning processes. Energy companies should institutionalize comprehensive and formal strategic planning processes that clearly align organizational vision, mission, strategic objectives, and operational activities. This will improve strategic alignment and enhance organizational performance.

Conduct regular reviews of strategic objectives. Management should establish mechanisms for periodic monitoring and evaluation of strategic objectives to ensure they remain responsive to changes in the business environment, technological advancements, and stakeholder expectations.

Promote evidence-based strategic decision-making. Senior management should utilize performance data, market intelligence, and environmental analysis when making strategic decisions. Evidence-based decision-making is likely to improve the quality of strategic choices and organizational outcomes.

Enhance employee participation in strategy implementation. Energy companies should encourage greater involvement of employees in strategy formulation and implementation through consultative forums, cross-functional teams, and continuous communication. Increased employee participation is likely to strengthen commitment to organizational goals and improve strategy execution.

Strengthen strategic leadership capacity. Organizations should invest in continuous leadership development programmes that equip managers with strategic planning, environmental scanning, change management, and strategic decision-making competencies necessary for improving organizational performance.

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