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Does Organizational Culture mediate the interplay of Strategic Agility on Organizational Performance? Evidence from Accredited Universities in Kenya



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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the challenges affecting the performance of accredited universities in Kenya, with a focus on understanding the role of organizational culture (OC) as a mediator in the relationship between strategic agility (SA) and organizational performance (OP).

Methodology: The study was anchored on the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), which underscores the importance of adapting to changing environments through strategic capabilities. To reinforce the mediating role, Competing Values Framework (CVF) supplemented the anchor theory. Using a descriptive correlational survey design, the research targeted a census of 78 accredited universities in Kenya. Data was gathered using a 5-point Likert scale, and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was employed for data estimation and analysis within the lenses of PROCESS macro model of testing mediation.

Findings: The findings from the study affirmed the significant mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between strategic agility and organizational performance. The results highlighted that the alignment of strategic agility with organizational culture plays a crucial role in enhancing the performance of universities.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Based on these findings, the study made recommendations for policy and management practices that focus on fostering a culture that supports strategic agility. This approach is expected to help improve organizational performance in Kenyan universities by enabling them to adapt to emerging challenges and optimize their operational effectiveness.

Keywords: *Strategic Agility, Organizational Culture, Organizational Performance, Accredited Universities*

1. Introduction

Accredited universities in Kenya are essential to the country's development, offering higher education, promoting research and innovation, and equipping graduates with skills to support economic growth and solve societal issues. They serve as centers for knowledge generation, intellectual exchange, and workforce preparation for an ever-changing global landscape. However, these institutions face numerous challenges that affect their effectiveness Kiilu et al. (2023). Financial limitations, stemming from reduced government funding and delayed allocations, hinder their ability to improve infrastructure and maintain educational standards. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological change surpasses their capacity to adopt modern learning technologies, creating a gap in digital integration. Rising student enrollments put pressure on limited resources, while high graduate unemployment rates raise concerns about the relevance of academic programs (Govuzela & Mafini, 2019). Furthermore, universities must navigate strict regulatory demands from the Commission for University Education (CUE). Addressing these issues requires innovative funding strategies, strategic adaptability, and closer alignment between curricula and industry needs to strengthen Kenya's higher education system.

Strategic agility is a critical factor in enhancing organizational performance as it equips institutions to respond effectively to changing environmental conditions, allocate resources dynamically, and capitalize on emerging opportunities. By incorporating strategic sensitivity, organizations remain alert to market trends and disruptions, enabling proactive decision-making (Kenzi & Schimike, 2020). Resource fluidity further strengthens this agility by facilitating the swift reallocation of resources to align with evolving priorities, ensuring operational efficiency and strategic alignment. Collective commitment among employees fosters a unified purpose, driving consistent efforts toward achieving organizational goals. Research has consistently shown that organizations with high levels of strategic agility perform better in terms of profitability, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. These organizations can navigate uncertainties, mitigate risks, and adapt to evolving challenges, securing long-term competitiveness and success (Vrontis et al., 2023).

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in moderating the relationship between strategic agility and performance by shaping the norms, behaviors, and values that underpin agile practices. A culture that embraces change, collaboration, and innovation reinforces strategic sensitivity, ensuring employees remain proactive and responsive to environmental shifts (Elshach & Sutton, 2023). Teamwork and shared goals foster collective commitment, promoting coordinated efforts toward strategic objectives. Also, a culture that prioritizes flexibility and adaptability enhances resource fluidity, allowing for efficient resource reallocation when priorities change (Clauss et al., 2019). As a mediator, organizational culture ensures that the principles of agility are deeply embedded within an organization, amplifying their positive impact on performance. Without a supportive cultural foundation, the potential benefits of strategic agility may be diminished, limiting its effectiveness in driving organizational success. Establishing a robust and adaptive

culture is therefore essential for fully realizing the performance benefits associated with strategic agility (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

1.1 Problem Statement

The performance of accredited universities in Kenya is crucial for the country's economic and social advancement, as these institutions provide skilled graduates, foster research, and contribute to innovation in line with national priorities such as Vision 2030. However, their effectiveness has been undermined by persistent challenges. Limited government funding, increasing dependence on self-sponsored students, and resource constraints have significantly impacted their ability to sustain quality education and infrastructure (Kiilu et al., 2023). The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic further exposed gaps in digital transformation and institutional resilience. Additionally, a misalignment between academic programs and labor market requirements has raised concerns about graduate employability, highlighting the need for improved governance, funding strategies, and curriculum relevance.

Strategic agility has been recognized as a key enabler for addressing these challenges, as it equips universities to adapt to changing environments, leverage opportunities, and maintain competitiveness. However, many Kenyan universities struggle to implement agile strategies effectively due to bureaucratic structures, rigid decision-making processes, and constrained resources (Chan & Muthuveloo, 2022). Organizational culture is a significant factor in this context, as entrenched traditions and hierarchical systems often resist change, making it difficult to adopt flexible and innovative approaches. The link between strategic agility, organizational culture and performance remains controversial owing to contradictory findings. This is attributed to a continuum of indicators which are used to measure these variables (Luu, 2024). While the relationship between strategic agility, organizational culture, and performance is well-documented globally, there remains limited exploration of these dynamics in Kenyan universities, creating contextual gaps in understanding their interplay within this specific context.

Furthermore, existing research on strategic agility and organizational culture in academia often focuses on non-African contexts (Chan & Muthuveloo, 2022), leaving Kenyan universities underrepresented, thereby creating a contextual gap. Methodologically, few studies have examined the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between strategic agility and university performance, resulting in insufficient empirical evidence to inform tailored interventions. Bridging these gaps is essential for fostering institutional adaptability and resilience (Schuldt & Gomes, 2020), ensuring that Kenyan universities can better align their operations with industry needs, embrace innovation, and enhance their overall performance to meet both local and global expectations.

2. Literature Review

This study conducted a review of both theoretical and empirical literature to examine the connection between strategic agility, organizational culture, and organizational performance. The

theoretical literature helped establish a framework for understanding how strategic agility can affect performance through the influence of culture. In addition, empirical studies (Indiya et al., 2021; Schuldt & Gomes, 2020; Felipe et al., 2017; Ehtesham et al., 2011). were reviewed to validate the theoretical concepts, providing evidence on the mediating role of organizational culture. This literature review contributed to the formulation of hypotheses and shaped the study's methodology, offering a well-rounded perspective on the dynamics within accredited universities in Kenya.

2.1 Theoretical Literature

This study is based on the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT) proposed by Teece et al. (1997), which highlights the importance of an organization's ability to continuously adapt and innovate by integrating and reconfiguring its resources to respond to changing environments. According to the theory, firms that possess strong dynamic capabilities are better equipped to navigate market changes and maintain a competitive edge. In the context of this research, DCT offers a useful framework for understanding how strategic agility, a key element of dynamic capabilities, influences organizational performance. It provides insight into how universities in Kenya can leverage their strategic agility to adjust to evolving educational demands and enhance their performance outcomes (Teece et al., 2023).

Teece et al.'s (1997) theory also emphasizes the role of organizational culture in enabling dynamic capabilities. The alignment between strategic agility and organizational culture is crucial for facilitating adaptability and improving performance. In this study, DCT is used to examine how organizational culture mediates the relationship between strategic agility and performance in accredited universities. The theory suggests that universities must not only develop strategic agility but also foster a culture that encourages innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness. By applying DCT, this study explores how the synergy between strategic agility and organizational culture can enhance performance, particularly in the face of external challenges and uncertainties in the education sector.

2.3 Empirical Literature

Strategic agility has emerged as a critical driver of organizational performance, with research highlighting its role in enhancing competitive advantage, operational efficiency, and financial outcomes. Ojha (2008) examined its influence on operational capabilities, such as innovation, disaster resilience, and cost efficiency, although the results regarding financial performance were mixed. Other studies, like those by Khoshnood and Nematizadeh (2017) and Shin et al. (2015), demonstrated a strong connection between strategic agility and improved competitive capacities and customer retention. However, inconsistencies in findings concerning financial performance suggest the need for further exploration in specific contexts.

In developing economies, studies such as those by Ofoegbu and Akanbi (2012) and Gerald et al. (2020) revealed positive links between strategic agility and organizational performance,

particularly in sectors like manufacturing and SMEs. Similarly, research in Asia and Africa, including work by Nurjaman et al. (2021) and Govuzela and Mafini (2019), emphasized the transformative potential of strategic agility in industries like logistics and small enterprises. However, variations in the operationalization of strategic agility and performance, coupled with context-specific challenges, have contributed to conflicting outcomes, highlighting the need for further investigation.

Despite the wealth of research on strategic agility, much of it has focused on industries such as banking, manufacturing, or SMEs, often in developed economies. There has been limited attention paid to the application of strategic agility within higher education institutions, especially in developing contexts like Kenya. This represents a significant contextual gap, as universities face unique challenges that may affect how strategic agility influences their performance.

The inconsistent findings on the relationship between strategic agility and performance, combined with the lack of studies in the Kenyan university context, underscore the need for further investigation. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the impact of strategic agility on the performance of accredited universities in Kenya via organizational culture. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into how these institutions can leverage strategic agility to enhance adaptability and achieve institutional success.

It is against this backdrop that the current study tests the following hypothesis:

H₀₁: Mediating role of organizational culture on the link between strategic agility and performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which was ideal for capturing a detailed snapshot of the variables and their relationships at a specific moment in time. A census approach was used to include all units within the target population, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate representation of the data. The target population comprised 78 accredited universities in Kenya. Respondents were drawn from the institutions' top management teams, as they possess critical insights into the universities' strategic operations and performance. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the study's objectives across the entire population under investigation.

3.1 Measurement of Variables

Strategic agility was measured by calculating a composite score that averaged the values of its four dimensions: partnership collaboration, collective commitment, resource fluidity, and strategic sensitivity. Organizational culture was assessed through an index created by integrating three elements: learning culture, entrepreneurial culture, and adaptability culture. Organizational performance was evaluated using an overall score derived from the average of four indicators: internal business processes, customer perspective, learning and growth, and funding perspective.

3.2 Data Analysis and Model Specification

The data analysis for the study involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of the key variables: strategic agility (SA), organizational culture (OC), and organizational performance (OP). Measures such as mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated to provide insights into the central tendencies and variability of these variables. For inferential analysis, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was employed to test the relationships between SA, OC, and OP, and to determine the strength and direction of these associations. OLS regression was selected due to its suitability for examining the impact of independent variables (SA and OC) on the dependent variable organizational performance, allowing for accurate parameter estimation and evaluation of statistical significance.

Moreover, the mediation process was assessed using the product of coefficient approach. This method was applied to test the indirect effects of strategic agility on organizational performance through organizational culture as a mediator. By multiplying the coefficients of SA → OC and OC → OP, the study was able to determine if and how organizational culture mediated the relationship between SA and OP. This approach helped to assess whether organizational culture plays a significant role in enhancing the impact of strategic agility on organizational performance, providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics between these variables. For estimation purposes, the following model was applied. Top of Form Bottom

$$OP = i_3 + c'SA + bi_2 + abSA + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where: c , a & b = path coefficients; i_3 = constant; OP = organization performance, SA = strategic agility, ε = error term.

4. Research Findings

This section of the research paper presents the diagnostic, bivariate results and analytical models. OLS was used to test the study hypotheses, facilitating the evaluation of the effect the mediating effect of organization culture on the relationship between strategic agility and performance of accredited universities in Kenya.

4.1 Diagnostic Tests

The study performed four critical diagnostic tests to validate the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model: normality, multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Normality testing ensured that the residuals were normally distributed, which is crucial for reliable hypothesis testing and accurate confidence intervals. Multicollinearity was evaluated to identify and address any strong correlations between independent variables that could compromise the stability and interpretation of the regression coefficients. Linearity was assessed to confirm that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was linear, as this assumption is fundamental for accurate model estimation. Additionally, homoscedasticity was examined to verify that the

residuals had constant variance across all levels of the independent variables, as any presence of heteroscedasticity could lead to inefficient estimates and biased conclusions.

Table 1. Diagnostic Test

Assumption	Type of Test	Results
Normality	Skewness/Kurtosis Test	Data was normally distributed with $p > 0.05$
Multicollinearity	VIF) and tolerance value	No multicollinearity VIF < 10 and tolerance > 0.1 .
Linearity	ANOVA test	Deviation from linearity had a $p > 0.05$ thus affirming linearity
Heteroscedasticity	Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test	Data was homoscedastic with $p > 0.05$

Table 1 outlines the results of the diagnostic tests conducted to evaluate key assumptions for the OLS regression analysis. First, the Skewness/Kurtosis test confirmed that the data was normally distributed, with a p-value greater than 0.05. This result supports the assumption of normality, which is essential for valid hypothesis testing and accurate confidence interval estimation. Next, the Multicollinearity test, using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values, showed no signs of multicollinearity. The VIF values were below 10, and the tolerance values were above 0.1, indicating that the independent variables were not highly correlated. This outcome assures that the regression coefficients will be stable and interpretable.

For linearity, an ANOVA test was conducted, revealing no significant deviations from linearity with a p-value over 0.05. This finding confirms that the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables can be assumed. Finally, the Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test was used to assess homoscedasticity. The results showed that the data was homoscedastic, with a p-value greater than 0.05. This suggests that the residual variance remained consistent across all levels of the independent variables, ensuring that the regression estimates are unbiased and efficient.

4.2 Univariate and Correlation Analysis

This section discusses the results of the preliminary data examination, focusing on the behavior of individual variables and their interrelationships. The univariate analysis looks at each variable on its own, revealing key characteristics such as central tendencies, variability, and distribution

patterns, while also identifying potential outliers or anomalies. In contrast, the correlation analysis investigates the strength and direction of the linear relationships between pairs of variables, offering a clearer understanding of how the independent and dependent variables are connected.

Table 2: Univariate and Correlation Analysis

Statistic	Descriptive statistics		Correlation analysis		
	Variable	M	SD	Strategic Agility	p
Strategic agility	4.00	0.63	1		
Organization culture	3.91	0.65	0.54**		0.000
Organizational performance	3.79	0.53	0.42**		0.000

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 displays the results of the univariate and correlation analysis for the variables Strategic Agility, Organizational Culture, and Organizational Performance. The descriptive statistics show that the mean (M) and SD for each variable are as follows: strategic agility (M = 4.00, SD = 0.63), organizational culture (M = 3.91, SD = 0.65), and organizational Performance (M = 3.79, SD = 0.53). These results indicate that respondents generally rated all three variables highly, with low variability across responses.

The correlation analysis reveals significant positive associations between the variables. strategic agility is moderately positively correlated with organizational culture ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that organizations with higher strategic agility tend to exhibit stronger organizational cultures. Likewise, there is a positive correlation between strategic agility and organizational performance ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of strategic agility are associated with better organizational performance. Both correlations are statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), reinforcing that these relationships are not likely due to chance.

4.3 Regression Results

Mediation analysis in this study was performed using the product of coefficients approach, with a focus on the Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval technique, using PROCESS macro model. This method was employed to explore the indirect effect of strategic agility on organizational performance through the mediator, organizational culture. With 5000 bootstrap samples, the technique offered precise estimates of the confidence intervals, enhancing the reliability of the mediation analysis.

Table 3: Estimation Results Using Bias Bootstrap Confidence Interval Technique

Total Effect of Strategic Agility on Organizational Performance					
Effect	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI
0.240	0.065	4.417	0.000	0.109	0.370
Direct Effect of Strategic Agility on Organizational Performance					
Effect	SE	t	p	LCI	UCI
0.139	0.072	1.936	0.057	-0.004	0.282
Indirect Effect of Strategic Agility on Organizational Performance					
	Bootstrap	Effect	BootSE	BootLCI	BootUCI
OC	a*b	0.101	0.042	0.033	0.200

Based on 5000 bootstrap samples

Table 3 shows the estimation results for the total, direct, and indirect effects of strategic agility on organizational performance using the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval technique. The results provide insights into the mediation process, with organizational culture serving as the mediator. The total effect of strategic agility on organizational performance is 0.240, with a standard error (SE) of 0.065 and a t-value of 4.417, which is statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. The 95% confidence interval ranges from 0.109 to 0.370, further confirming the significant positive relationship between strategic agility and organizational performance. This suggests that strategic agility has a substantial impact on organizational performance, both directly and indirectly.

The direct effect of strategic agility on organizational performance is 0.139, with a standard error of 0.072 and a t-value of 1.936. This effect is marginally significant at the $p = 0.057$ level, and the 95% confidence interval ranges from -0.004 to 0.282. The fact that the lower bound of the confidence interval is close to zero indicates that although there is a positive direct effect, it is not as strong or consistent as the total effect. The indirect effect, representing the impact of strategic agility on organizational performance through the mediator organizational culture, is 0.101 with a bootstrap standard error (BootSE) of 0.042. The bootstrap confidence interval (BootLCI = 0.033, BootUCI = 0.200) does not include zero, confirming the significance of the indirect effect. This suggests that organizational culture mediates the relationship between strategic agility and

organizational performance. Overall, the findings indicate that while strategic agility has a direct positive effect on organizational performance, a significant portion of this effect is mediated through organizational culture. This emphasizes the important role of organizational culture in strengthening the relationship between strategic agility and performance.

5 Discussion

The study's findings indicate that organizational culture plays a mediating role in the relationship between strategic agility and organizational performance, leading to the rejection of null hypothesis (H_{01}). This result supports the competing values framework, which asserts that organizational culture influences various organizational outcomes, including performance. By demonstrating that organizational culture fully mediates this relationship, the study underscores the importance of aligning cultural values and norms with strategic agility to enhance performance.

These results are consistent with the work of Felipe et al. (2017), who stress the critical role of organizational culture in connecting strategic agility to performance. Their study highlights the significance of a strong organizational culture, particularly the adhocracy culture, which promotes flexibility and adaptability. This finding aligns with the current study, which suggests that organizational culture is vital for maximizing the impact of strategic agility on performance, especially in dynamic environments.

In contrast, Khan et al. (2021) found mixed results, with some cultural typologies showing no significant effect on the relationship between strategic agility and performance. This variation highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding the role of different cultural types. The current study contributes to this area by investigating multiple cultural typologies, aiming to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational culture mediates the relationship between strategic agility and performance, thus addressing gaps identified in previous research.

6 Conclusion

The study concludes that organizational culture significantly mediates the relationship between strategic agility and organizational performance in accredited universities in Kenya. It shows that while strategic agility has a direct impact on performance, this effect is strengthened when organizational culture is considered as a mediator. The alignment between strategic agility and a strong, adaptive organizational culture is essential for universities to achieve superior performance in a rapidly changing educational landscape. This highlights the importance of nurturing a culture that supports flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness which are the key traits of strategic agility to improve overall institutional performance.

Moreover, the study finds that organizational culture does not merely complement but fully mediates the relationship between strategic agility and performance. This suggests that the effectiveness of strategic agility in enhancing performance is largely shaped by the cultural norms

and values present within the institution. For universities, developing a culture that encourages innovation, collaboration, and agility is crucial for translating strategic agility into tangible performance gains. The findings also suggest that universities with cultures that align with strategic agility are better positioned to respond to external challenges, such as changing student demands and market shifts, thus improving their performance.

In contrast to some previous research that reported mixed outcomes regarding the role of culture in this relationship, the current study provides a clearer understanding of how organizational culture enhances the impact of strategic agility on performance. By focusing on accredited universities in Kenya, the study offers valuable insights into the cultural elements that foster strategic agility and drive performance. It emphasizes that universities must not only implement agile strategies but also cultivate a cultural environment that supports these strategies to maximize their positive effects on performance.

7 Recommendations

Drawing from the study's findings, it is recommended that management in accredited universities in Kenya focus on cultivating a robust organizational culture that complements strategic agility. University leaders should recognize that achieving high performance is not solely dependent on strategic agility but also on a culture that fosters flexibility, collaboration, and adaptability. To build such a culture, management should implement training programs designed to instill these values throughout the institution, involving faculty, staff, and students. Creating a climate of open communication and idea-sharing is crucial to ensuring that innovation and agility are embedded in the university's operations, enabling it to thrive in a rapidly changing educational environment.

On the policy front, it is important for education policymakers to craft policies that promote the integration of strategic agility and organizational culture into university governance. These policies should encourage universities to align their cultural development with strategic objectives, enabling institutions to remain adaptable to shifts in educational needs and market dynamics. Policies that facilitate agile decision-making, investment in adaptive technologies, and the fostering of a culture of innovation and responsiveness will allow universities to stay competitive. Additionally, leadership training programs should focus on developing competencies related to strategic agility, ensuring that university administrators are prepared to lead effectively in an ever-evolving landscape.

Lastly, universities should engage in continuous evaluations of their organizational culture to ensure it remains supportive of strategic agility. Management should implement regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups, to assess whether the culture aligns with the university's strategic goals and identify areas for improvement. Furthermore, universities should incorporate cultural development objectives into their strategic plans and allocate resources to cultivate a culture that sustains long-term performance. By integrating strategic agility within the

organizational culture, universities will be better equipped to respond to external changes and improve their overall performance.

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