

# Relationship between Strategic Managers' Self-Awareness and Leadership Performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya

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## Abstract

There is a need to help strategic managers at the South Eastern Kenya University to attain higher levels of self-awareness. This is because self-awareness is known to have a strong influence on leadership performance. This study focused on the relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya. It was conducted in South Eastern Kenya University. The study targeted all the 75 managers in the 75 Departments at South Eastern Kenya University. Each of these departments is headed by one manager. 4 out of the 75 managers were used for pilot study leaving the researcher with a sample of 71. The researcher employed purposive and census sampling technique in selecting a sample of 71 respondents. It employed an ex post facto research design. The researcher tried to relate this after-the-fact treatment to an outcome. The target population included all the 75 managers in South Eastern Kenya University. Data was collected through administration of structured questionnaires with the selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point range Likert scale to assess strategic managers' emotional intelligence forces and leadership performance. The collected data was then processed and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 28.0 for windows. The findings of the study showed that: there was a strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.751$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between self-awareness and leadership performance. The findings of this study could help universities to boost the level of managers' self-awareness and this in turn may lead to the improvement in leadership performance. The study recommends that: the University administration should continually train their staff on the relationship between strategic managers' self-awareness and leadership performance; they should employ personnel with high degree of self-awareness through conducting interviews with questionnaires that assess these attributes and invest heavily in teamwork activities so that they may have employees who have high degree of self-awareness.

**Key Words:** self-awareness, Leader, Leadership, Leadership Performance

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## I. Introduction

Leadership performance is said to be the leader's potential to positively influence subordinates and the rest of the stakeholders to achieve the targets of the entity (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2005) while self-awareness is the ability to recognize thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, towards knowledge of how our values and cultures affect our thoughts and how it is different from others (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Leadership performance is becoming very essential due to competitive working environment and globalization of the firms. The international presence of the firms creates pressure to the employees to perform and sustain it. Managers are required to meet clients' expectations and retain the employee's performance (Dobre, 2013). These managers are required to manage and solve conflicts. They should be able to identify problems, conflicts and to identify skill to resolve it (MindTools, 2020). To sustain a good environment within the organization, managers are expected to be in a position in to come up with proper skills of handling their emotions and ensure harmony among employees' character and their own reactions (Barsade & O'Neill, 2016). Research has shown that good leadership has continued to be important for quickly changing entities (Yukl, 2002). This has caused concerted research efforts on leadership gaining speed of which self-awareness of managers has been identified as a critical potential thing required for effective leadership to be achieved (Tang, Yin & Nelson, 2010).

Good leadership performance entails listening to the fellow workers before one makes critical decisions, which requires putting into consideration individuals' self-awareness (Stadler & Dyer, 2013). The general consensus in this area of research is that, there is little or no leadership will be able to influence workers in the absence of self-awareness (Goleman, 1995). Leaders are under pressure most of the time to discover solutions to

ensure outcomes-driven achievements in a quickly changing work environment. Managers work to structure new skills to increase employee satisfaction, reduce cost support growth, innovation and research.

Many researchers have not attached importance to emotions in the past study of organizational management in the working environment. The workplace was seen as an acceptable environment where emotions would prevent the art of sound judgment. For this reason, emotions were not even seen as explanation for workplace phenomenon (Grandey, 2000). Effective managers also have a high level of self-awareness. It has now become recognized as an important part of management.

Goleman (1998) argues that a person can possess the best education in the globe but still will not make an effective manager. Poor self-awareness is one of the key issues of the dark part of management (Austin et al., 2007). For example, it is known that in a number of occasions for managers to show high sense of urgency to realize pressing targets, but, when juniors' expectations are not taken into account, the intended purpose may not be effectively realized. This is commonly found in settings where there is need for working together and inputs across the entity (Watkins et al., 2017). Research has established that self-awareness is very important in realizing organizational targets and excelling in dynamic settings (Eby, Adams, Russell, et al. 2000). Effective strategic managers have a high level of self-awareness. Self-awareness has become recognized as an important part of management. Several researchers have asserted that self-awareness is a very important attribute that influences leadership performance (Jasleen & Anupam, 2019).

Several studies have been conducted globally on the relationship between strategic managers' self-awareness and leadership performance. Findings indicate that there are many research gaps that need to be addressed. In the United States of America, they have been able to see a relationship between self-awareness and effective leadership performance. O'Boyle and colleagues (2011) established that a strong relationship between work performance and self-awareness.

A study done in South Africa on self-awareness and transformational leadership and which used Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire on 314 associates, leaders, peers and subordinates revealed positive correlation between self-awareness and transformational leadership style (Vrba, 2007). These results support those of other studies, in where various scholars used different instruments for self-awareness, showing a positive link between self-awareness and transformational leadership. In the developing economy setting like Africa, matters of leadership performance and self-awareness have not attracted reasonable research attention (Mushtaq & Aashiq, 2018), and the few studies done in the African setting, Kenya included are not in the university sector.

There is little literature available in Kenya on the relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance. Empirical studies conducted so far are on self-awareness and leadership styles. Mwangi, Mukulu, and Kabare (2011) argue that the use of self-awareness is an important part of transformational leadership in Public Universities. These authors found that there is a significant link between self-awareness and transformational leadership.

Leaders who only depend on authority and power to establish good organizational output separately are more likely to fail in realizing expected targets linked to change programme. Therefore, for an organization to succeed in this transformation period, managers in all areas of employment should be emotionally stable to coordinate and manage dynamic employees and to promote both personal and leadership performance. This study is expected to improve the body of knowledge on leadership performance and strategic self-awareness. The findings may enable university leaders to improve their strategic self-awareness which would perhaps improve performance and bring change in the area of leadership performance. Leadership performance and self-awareness are becoming very important factors in leadership performance in that they give a competitive advantage to leaders in providing an environment where all the stakeholders are satisfied. This study focuses on the assessment of the relationship between strategic manager's self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University.

## **II. Literature Review**

Self-awareness helps us to see issues from the perspective of others, exercise self-control, boost creativity and be productive, and experience success in ourselves and in our output as well as high self-esteem (Silvia & O'Brien, 2004). It leads us to make better decision (Ridley, Schutz, Glanz, & Weinstein, 1992). The benefits of Self-Awareness include: proactivity, boosting our self-acceptance, and encouraging positive self-development (Sutton, 2016). It also leads to efficient decision making (Ridley, Schutz, Glanz, & Weinstein, 1992). It can also make people better at their jobs, improve communication skills in the work environment, and promote manager's self-confidence and job-related personal wellbeing (Sutton, Williams, & Allinson, 2015).

The benefits give enough reason why managers should work to boost self-awareness. Self-awareness has the ability to promote basically every experience one possesses, as it is a mechanism and a tool that can be utilized anywhere, anytime, to ground oneself in the moment, realistically gauge themselves and the condition,

and enable one make good decisions. Self-awareness works to boost manager's communication ability, self-confidence, and performance (Sutton et al., 2015). It can easily be noticed the way self-awareness leads to such outcomes in the work environment, because better self-evaluation automatically leads to improved alignment between manager's actions and their levels, resulting in better leadership performance.

Although one may imagine that more experience as a manager and greater power in their role lead to improved self-awareness which may not be the case. Work experience may be positive or even negative as it concerns learning and boosting the self. It should be noted that even positive exposure can make one to attribute success to them when in actual sense it may have had more to do with the situations, resulting to false confidence (Eurich, 2018).

**Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between strategic managers' self-awareness and leadership Performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya.

**Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis that there was no statistically significant relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya was tested using data collected in the study.

**III. Methodology**

The study utilized *ex-post facto* research design. The target population for this study included all the managers in the 75 departments at the South Eastern Kenya University. Each of these departments is headed by one manager. 4 out of the 75 managers were used for pilot study leaving the researcher with a sample of 71. In order to ensure their different categories of the sample population are represented, the researcher employed purposive and census sampling technique in selecting a sample of 71 respondents.

**Table 1: Sample Size**

Respondents	Target population	Sample population
University Managers	71	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>

Data was collected through administration of structured questionnaires with the selected respondents. The questionnaire used a five-point range Likert scale to assess strategic managers' self-awareness and leadership performance. The scale sought to measure the managers' levels of agreement or disagreement with 10 statements related to their self-awareness and 30 on leadership performance. The research instrument was validated in two ways. In the first method, the researcher went through the instrument in relationship with the set objectives to make sure that it contains all the necessary information. The second method involved consulting and seeking for the opinion of the experts from the university. The instruments were taken for piloting on a population that is similar to the target population, 4 of the 75 departments that were not included in the sample. Through the use of Cronbach's alpha (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999) a reliability coefficient was determined. The study obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.81 which was deemed sufficient since a reliability coefficient of 0.7 and above is considered to be sufficient enough to confirm and reflect the internal consistency of the instruments (Aronson *et al.*, 1990).

**Results of the Study**

To achieve the study objective, the respondents were requested to indicate the way they feel concerning the statements given in Table 4.5 using a 5-point Likert Scale, with Strongly agree (S.A), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD). The responses were presented in Table 2

**Table 2: Self-awareness and Leadership Performance**

	Self-awareness	SA		A		U		D		SD		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses	43	60.6	27	38.0	1	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>
2.	I have always feared to trust my instincts	4	5.6	15	21.1	4	5.6	37	52.1	11	15.5	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>
3.	I usually sense when something is not right	38	53.5	23	32.4	23	32.4	6	8.5	6	8.5	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>
4.	I am open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning and self-development	34	47.9	33	46.5	0	0.0	2	2.8	2	2.8	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>
5.	I have make decisions ignoring what	9	12.7	27	38.0	8	11.3	24	33.8	3	4.2	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>

	my heart tells me											
6.	I recognize how my feelings affect my performance	22 31.0	44 62.0	4 5.6	1 1.4	0 0.0	0 0.0	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>			
7.	I am reflective and try to learn from experience	38 53.5	33 46.5	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>			
8.	I fear letting my emotions guide me	22 31.0	38 53.5	2 2.8	5 2.8	4 5.6	4 5.6	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>			
9.	I have a guiding awareness of my values and goals	25 35.2	38 53.5	5 7.0	3 4.2	0 0.0	0 0.0	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>			
10.	I usually fail to spot potential trouble	3 4.2	13 18.3	12 16.9	23 32.4	20 28.2	20 28.2	<b>71</b>	<b>100.0</b>			

Table 2 shows that, majority (62%) and (60.6%) Strongly agreed with the statement that, they recognize how their feelings affect their performance and that they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Also 53.3% strongly agreed that they usually sense when something is not right and they are reflective and try to learn from experience. However 52.1% disagreed with the statement that they always feared to trust their instincts.

The researcher further sought to establish the relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya. This was done by using Pearson Correlation to test hypothesis below.

**H0:** There is no significant relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya.

The results were presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Relationship between Self-awareness and Leadership Performance**

		Self-awareness	Leadership Performance
Self-awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.751
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	71	71
Leadership performance	Pearson Correlation	.751	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	71	71

Table 3 shows that, there is a strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.751, p < 0.05$ ) between self-awareness and leadership performance. The researcher therefore fails to accept the hypothesis and concludes that, there is a significant relationship between self-awareness and leadership performance in South Eastern Kenya University, Kenya.

**Table 4: Multiple Regression for Self-awareness indicators and Leadership Performance**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.221	.282		4.336	.000
Level of understanding on strengths and weaknesses( $X_1$ )	.034	.077	.055	.435	.001
Ability to manage teams and individual interests ( $X_2$ )	.014	.038	.049	.362	.002
Level of understanding ( $X_3$ )	.032	.057	.071	.562	.003
Level of ability ( $X_4$ )	.166	.147	.159	1.127	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Leadership performance

$$y = 1.221 + 0.034x_1 + 0.014x_2 + 0.032x_3 + 0.166x_4$$

y = Self-awareness

$x_1$  = Level of understanding on strengths and weaknesses

$x_2$  = Level of ability to manage teams and individual interests

$x_3$  = Level of understanding

$x_4$  = Level of ability

The results in table 4 indicates that there was significant association between Self-awareness and leadership performance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore hypothesis  $H_{01}$  was rejected

#### **IV. Discussion**

From this objective it was established that there is a strong positive association between self-awareness and leadership performance. These results agree with Sutton et al., (2015) who argued that self-awareness improves our communication, confidence, and job performance in our organizations. Majority agreed with the statement that, they recognize how their feelings affect their performance, that they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they usually sense when something is not right, they are reflective and try to learn from experience and that they did not fear to trust their instincts. Self-awareness also allows us to see situations from the perspective of others, practice self-control, work creatively and productively, and experience pride in ourselves and our work as well as general self-esteem (Silvia & O'Brien, 2004). The implication here is that managers will be more proactive, boost their acceptance levels, encourage positive self-development, see things from the perspective of others, practice self-control, work creatively and productively, and experience pride in themselves and their work as well as general self-esteem, have better decision making skills and better their communication skills in the workplace. These benefits are very important and are reason enough to work on improving self-awareness.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there was a strong positive association between self-awareness and leadership performance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Most of the respondents strongly agreed that, they recognized how their feelings affected their performance, they were aware of their strengths and weaknesses respectively and that they usually sense when something is not right. Other respondents indicated that they always feared to trust their instincts.

#### **VI. Recommendations**

The University administration should continually train their staff on the relationship between strategic managers' self-awareness and leadership Performance. They should provide trainings on improvement of self-awareness among the staff so as to have managers who possess a high level of self-awareness to improve on work productivity, team work, and good problem-solving techniques among others. This will in turn bring about a positive effect on employees' performance so that universities may gain a sustainable competitive advantage in the market.

Since the study has established that there is a strong positive relationship between leadership performance and self-awareness, the university should employ personnel with high degree of these attributes through conducting interviews with questionnaires that assess this attribute. This will help the institutions to get employees who possess high degree of self-awareness which will in turn lead to high leadership performance.

Employees should also be helped to know how their feelings affect their leadership performance. They should also be helped to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and be able to sense when things are not right. Employees should be trained to trust their instincts which are very important ingredients in leadership performance.

Lastly, in order to improve the university culture universities should invest heavily in teamwork activities. This will make them have employees who have high degree of self-awareness which will in turn boost leadership performance qualities.

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