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Strategic Leadership Transition Management and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government

Mary Wali Mngoda
Scholar: School of Business, Economics & Social Sciences, Taita-Taveta University, Kenya

Patrick Mutua Kimaku
Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Economics & Social Sciences, Taita-Taveta University, Kenya

Karim Hassanali Omido
Associate Professor, School of Business, Economics & Social Sciences, Taita-Taveta University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Strategic leadership transition management has emerged as a critical determinant of performance in Kenya's devolved governance system. County governments are expected to ensure effective service delivery, fiscal sustainability, and socio-economic development; however, frequent leadership transitions, weak institutional capacity, inconsistent policy implementation, and poor leadership vision continue to hinder performance. In Taita Taveta County, these challenges are reflected in stalled development projects, inconsistent service delivery, underutilized resources, weak implementation of County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), and low own-source revenue despite existing governance and strategic planning frameworks. This study examined the influence of strategic leadership transition management on county government performance in Taita Taveta County, focusing on leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment and policy continuity and implementation as key dimensions of strategic leadership transition management. The study was anchored on Policy Implementation Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Leadership Succession Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. A descriptive research design was adopted targeting elected leaders, county executives, senior administrative officers, and community representatives. Using systematic sampling, 384 respondents were selected, of whom 363 returned usable questionnaires, representing a 94.5% response rate. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis using SPSS Version 29. The findings showed that leadership vision positively influenced performance through clear communication of development priorities and effective resource alignment. Institutional capacity was constrained by inadequate financial resources, weak ICT infrastructure, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems. Policy continuity and implementation emerged as the strongest predictor of county government performance. Strategic Alignment had a positive and significant effect implying that alignment of county plans, budgets, leadership priorities, and departmental operations improves governance efficiency. The four dimensions of strategic leadership transition management jointly explained 86.1% of the variance in county government performance ($R^2 = 0.861$). The findings revealed that the joint strategic leadership transition dimensions significantly affect county government performance, with incoming administrations often revising or abandoning existing strategic plans. The study concluded that effective strategic leadership transition management significantly enhances county government performance by promoting continuity, strengthening institutional capacity, improving policy implementation, and sustaining development priorities across leadership changes. The study recommends structured leadership transition policies, stronger vision implementation frameworks, investment in ICT and M&E systems, and institutionalized policy continuity mechanisms to improve governance stability and sustainable development outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Strategic Alignment; Leadership Vision; County Government Performance; Institutional Capacity; Policy Continuity

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Strategic leadership transition management has increasingly become a critical determinant of performance in public sector institutions, particularly within devolved governance systems where leadership changes significantly influence policy continuity, institutional stability, and service delivery. In Kenya, county governments are mandated to deliver efficient public services, maintain fiscal discipline, and promote socio-economic development. However, many counties continue to face persistent challenges such as weak institutional capacity, poor coordination across departments, inadequate resource utilization, inconsistent policy implementation, and frequent leadership changes that disrupt governance continuity. Strategic leadership transition management ensures that leadership succession, institutional structures, policy priorities, and administrative processes remain aligned toward the achievement of county development goals. When effectively managed, it enhances accountability, continuity, efficiency, and sustainable service delivery (Mwanzia & Kihara, 2022; Omondi & Wanjiru, 2023).

Leadership transitions significantly influence strategic continuity and county government performance. These transitions occur through elections, political appointments, administrative restructuring, and changes in top management. While leadership change can introduce innovation, reforms, and renewed strategic focus, poorly managed transitions often disrupt development plans, delay projects, weaken institutional memory, and create policy inconsistencies. Incoming administrations may abandon, revise, or re-prioritize projects initiated by their predecessors, resulting in duplication of efforts, wastage of resources, stalled development programs, and declining public trust. Effective leadership transition management therefore requires structured succession planning, clear leadership vision, strong institutional capacity, and policy continuity mechanisms to preserve development momentum and governance stability (Omondi & Barasa, 2021; Kesner & Sebora, 1994).

Globally, strategic leadership transition management is widely recognized as an essential governance mechanism for sustaining institutional performance and long-term development goals. Countries such as United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, and South Korea have institutionalized strong succession planning systems, performance management frameworks, and legal safeguards that support policy continuity during political and administrative transitions. These systems ensure continuity, accountability, and operational efficiency even during changes in leadership. In contrast, countries with weak governance structures often experience leadership disruptions that result in stalled reforms, poor policy implementation, and reduced institutional effectiveness (Smith & Johnson, 2023; Andersen & Snihur, 2024; Tan, 2022; Lee & Kim, 2021).

In Africa, the implementation of strategic leadership transition management presents mixed outcomes. South Africa has made notable progress through integrated planning systems and performance-based governance structures that support leadership continuity. Nigeria has introduced governance reforms, although corruption, weak institutional capacity, and inconsistent leadership commitment continue to hinder effective implementation. Ghana and Ethiopia are gradually strengthening governance continuity through decentralization reforms and institutional restructuring, although financial constraints, political instability, and limited technical expertise remain significant barriers. These experiences demonstrate that governance stability, leadership capacity, and institutional support are essential for successful strategic leadership transition management (Okeke & Ibrahim, 2021; Mokoena & Zondi, 2022).

In Kenya, devolution created opportunities for strengthening county governance through the alignment of County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), Annual Development Plans, strategic plans, and performance contracts with national development priorities. However, many counties continue to struggle with weak policy implementation, poor monitoring systems, inadequate stakeholder engagement, political interference, and leadership discontinuity. Leadership transitions often disrupt strategic plans and development priorities, making it difficult to sustain long-term projects and effective service delivery. The absence of strong institutional frameworks to safeguard policy continuity during leadership changes further weakens county government performance (Njeru & Mwangi, 2021; Aduda & Otieno, 2023).

Taita Taveta County provides an important case for examining strategic leadership transition management because of its recurring governance challenges and development interruptions associated with political leadership changes. Frequent leadership transitions have affected major county programs in agriculture, healthcare, water supply, infrastructure development, and revenue mobilization. Several projects have experienced delays, abandonment, duplication, or underperformance due to changes in political priorities, weak succession planning, and limited institutional continuity. Although legal frameworks such as the County Governments Act and County Integrated Development Plans exist to guide development, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing incoming leaders to alter or discontinue existing strategic priorities without adequate transition mechanisms (County Government of Taita Taveta, 2023; Omondi & Barasa, 2022).

The county also faces significant challenges in revenue mobilization and budget utilization. Although own-source revenue has shown gradual improvement, it remains below the targets set by the Commission on Revenue Allocation, limiting the county's capacity to finance development projects effectively. A substantial proportion of the county budget is allocated to recurrent expenditure rather than development expenditure, reducing investment in transformative and sustainable programs. Weak institutional capacity, inadequate financial resources, poor ICT infrastructure, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems further constrain county government performance and service delivery outcomes (KIPPRA, 2023; Njeru & Kathuri, 2022).

Despite these challenges, efforts have been made to strengthen governance continuity in Taita Taveta County through leadership induction programs, participatory governance structures, institutional reforms, and capacity-building initiatives supported by the Council of Governors and development partners. Public participation forums, ward-level committees, and leadership training programs have improved transparency, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and financial management. However, political patronage, weak accountability systems, resource mismanagement, and limited enforcement of policy continuity mechanisms continue to undermine these efforts and reduce the effectiveness of strategic leadership transition management (Council of Governors, 2023).

This study is important because it examines how strategic leadership transition management influences county government performance in Taita Taveta County. It focuses on leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment and policy continuity and implementation as the key dimensions of strategic leadership transition management affecting service delivery, fiscal sustainability, and socio-economic development. Understanding these relationships will help generate practical recommendations for improving governance stability, strengthening leadership succession systems, and enhancing sustainable county government performance.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic leadership transition management is a critical driver of county government performance, particularly in devolved governance systems where leadership continuity, institutional capacity, policy implementation, and strategic vision must work together to achieve sustainable development (Mwanzia & Kihara, 2022; Omondi & Wanjiru, 2023). County governments in Kenya are expected to translate strategic plans such as County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) into effective service delivery, fiscal sustainability, and socio-economic development. Effective leadership transitions, strong leadership vision, adequate institutional capacity, and continuity in policy implementation should preserve development priorities across political cycles and ensure efficient use of public resources (Njeru & Mwangi, 2021).

However, many Kenyan counties continue to experience weak leadership transition management, poor policy continuity, leadership instability, inadequate institutional capacity, and underperformance in service delivery (Aduda & Otieno, 2023). In Taita Taveta County, these challenges are particularly evident. Own-Source Revenue (OSR) increased from KES 347.7 million in FY 2019/20 to KES 547.9 million in FY 2024/25, but this remains significantly below the projected annual target of approximately KES 1.2 billion set by the Commission on Revenue Allocation, indicating weak fiscal sustainability and structural inefficiencies (Standard Media, 2024). Additionally, a large share of the county budget is allocated to recurrent expenditure rather than development expenditure, limiting investment in infrastructure and transformative programmes (KIPPRA, 2023).

The problem lies in the gap between expected strategic continuity and the fragmented implementation caused by poorly managed leadership transitions, weak institutional systems, limited leadership vision, and inconsistent policy priorities. Although frameworks such as the County Governments Act and CIDPs exist, leadership changes often result in revision, abandonment, or duplication of predecessor projects, delayed implementation, and inefficient resource utilization. Incoming administrations frequently shift strategic priorities without proper transition mechanisms, weakening institutional memory and disrupting long-term development plans (Omondi & Barasa, 2021; Nyaga & Kihara, 2021).

The consequences are significant, including inconsistent service delivery, stalled development projects, underutilized resources, weak revenue performance, poor fiscal sustainability, and slow socio-economic growth. These disruptions result in poor service delivery, stalled projects, and inefficient resource utilization, which ultimately undermine public trust and weaken institutional resilience (Casalegno et al., 2023; FitzGerald et al., 2021). Although previous studies have examined leadership succession and policy implementation, limited research has examined strategic leadership transition management as an integrated construct influencing county government performance in Kenya's devolved governance context. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by focusing on leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, and policy continuity and implementation in Taita Taveta County.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by one objective:

i). to examine the influence of strategic leadership transition management (leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, and policy continuity & implementation) and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya.

Research Question

The study sought to answer the following research question:

i). To what extent did strategic leadership transition management (leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, and policy continuity & implementation) and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya

Research Hypothesis

i). **Ho:** strategic leadership transition management (leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, and policy continuity & implementation) has no significant influence on County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study is anchored on four theories: Transformational Leadership Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, Policy Implementation Theory, and Strategic Alignment Theory. These theories explain how leadership vision, institutional capacity, policy continuity and implementation, and strategic alignment influence county government performance (Bass, 1985; Barney, 1991; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Henderson & Venkatraman, 1993). Transformational Leadership Theory was developed by Burns (1978) and expanded by Bass (1985). It explains how leaders inspire and motivate followers toward shared goals through vision, innovation, and change. The theory is relevant because leadership vision influences county government performance by ensuring leaders communicate development priorities and maintain continuity during transitions. In Taita Taveta County, visionary leadership can improve service delivery, accountability, and public trust while reducing policy inconsistency (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2021).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory, developed by Wernerfelt (1984) and advanced by Jay B. Barney Barney (1991), argues that sustainable performance depends on valuable, rare, inimitable, and organized resources. The theory supports institutional capacity as county governments require strong human resources, financial systems, ICT infrastructure, and monitoring frameworks to improve service delivery. Counties with strong institutional capacity are better positioned to manage leadership transitions and sustain development outcomes (Teece, 2018; Ambrosini & Altintas, 2022). Policy Implementation Theory by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) explains how public policies are translated into outcomes through leadership commitment, resources, and stakeholder support. It is relevant because policy continuity and implementation are often disrupted during leadership transitions, leading to project delays and wastage of resources. Strong implementation systems help maintain development priorities and improve fiscal sustainability (Hill & Hupe, 2022; Howlett, 2021).

Strategic Alignment Theory by Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) emphasizes aligning strategy, structure, leadership, and resources to achieve organizational goals. In county governments, alignment between CIDPs, budgets, leadership priorities, and institutional systems improves governance efficiency. Weak alignment causes stalled projects and poor fiscal performance. Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding how strategic leadership transition management enhances county government performance. Conceptually, the study links Strategic Leadership Transition Management, through leadership vision, institutional capacity, policy continuity, and strategic alignment, to County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County. Effective leadership transitions improve service delivery, fiscal sustainability, socio-economic development, and public trust through strengthened governance continuity.

Empirical literature shows that Strategic Leadership Transition Management significantly influences County Government Performance through leadership vision, institutional capacity, policy continuity and implementation, and strategic alignment. Leadership vision enhances strategic direction, employee commitment, accountability, and service delivery, with studies showing that visionary leaders improve infrastructure delivery,

citizen satisfaction, public trust, and alignment of County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) with development priorities (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Adewale & Olayiwola, 2021; Waweru & Korir, 2023). Institutional capacity, including adequate staffing, ICT systems, financial controls, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, improves planning, fiscal discipline, transparency, and project implementation, while weak institutional systems reduce governance effectiveness and public trust (Andrews et al., 2017; Mwesigwa, 2021; Musyoka & Mutinda, 2022).
Policy continuity and implementation ensure stable development priorities, stronger budgetary commitment, and better project completion rates, whereas political transitions often cause project abandonment, duplication, and poor service delivery (Cloete, 2020; Osei-Tutu, 2021; Njiru & Mwangi, 2022). Strategic alignment harmonizes county plans, leadership priorities, institutional systems, and resource allocation, leading to stronger accountability, governance efficiency, and socio-economic outcomes (Mwanzia & Kihara, 2022; Omondi & Wanjiru, 2023). Studies further show that effective strategic alignment strengthens governance continuity during political transitions by protecting long-term development priorities (Aduda & Otieno, 2023). However, most studies examine these variables independently rather than as integrated dimensions of Strategic Leadership Transition Management, and limited county-specific studies exist for Taita Taveta County. This study therefore seeks to fill this conceptual and contextual gap by examining how these four dimensions collectively influence county government performance.

Conceptual Framework

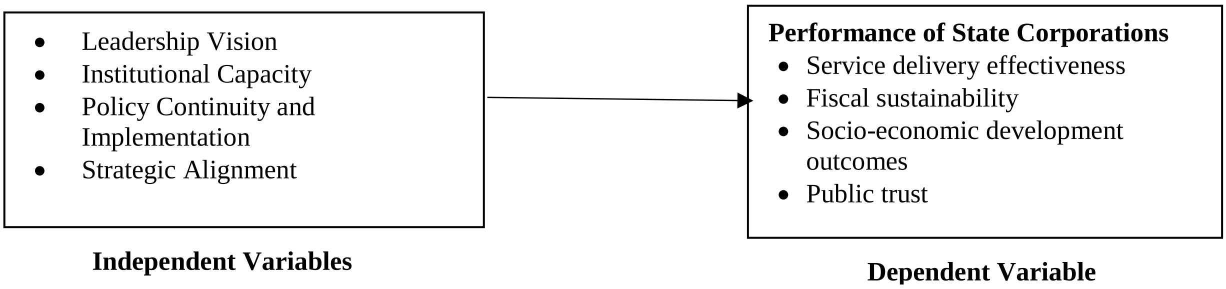

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the influence of strategic leadership transition management (leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, policy continuity and implementation) and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya. Descriptive research design is appropriate and effective the study aimed to describing the current status of variables without manipulating them (Babbie, 2021).

Target Population and Sampling Technique

The target population comprised of an estimated population of 400,000 residents of Taita Taveta County, Kenya (KNBS, 2024). The respondents comprised of residents and various stakeholders directly involved in governance, leadership, and administrative processes within Taita Taveta County. A systematic sampling technique was used to select respondents from the target population because it promoted fair representation, minimized selection bias, improved efficiency in the sampling process, and was suitable for the structured nature of state corporations by ensuring that each respondent had an equal chance of being selected. The sample size of 384 respondents was determined using the Bell, Brymann and Harley (2018) sampling frame formular for large population. This ensured that the sample sufficiently represented the target population while reducing the possibility of sampling error.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were designed to capture information on communication practices, employee involvement, technological adaptability, training and capacity building, government policies and regulations, and the performance of state corporations. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Primary data were gathered using structured questionnaires comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were developed to obtain information on leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, policy continuity and implementation, and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya. Before the main data collection exercise, a pilot study was carried out to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments.
According to Kothari (2017), validity concerns whether a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure for a specific purpose and group. Reliability refers to the consistency of a research instrument or procedure, such that repeated application under similar conditions produces the same results (Asenahabi, 2019), and is deemed acceptable based on the rule that when Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.9, it is considered excellent; when value is 0.8 is deemed very good and when it is 0.7, it is rated as good (Mwakima, Kimaku, & Mwithiga, 2025).

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions. Inferential statistical methods were also employed to test the study hypotheses. The study utilized correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of relationships among the study variables. In addition, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the effect leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, policy continuity and implementation, and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya.

To ensure the validity of the regression results, several diagnostic tests were conducted. These included tests for normality, heteroscedasticity, linearity, and multicollinearity. Such tests ensure that the data satisfy the assumptions required for regression analysis and improve the reliability of the findings. Overall, the methodology enabled the study to empirically assess the influence of strategic leadership transition management and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of Taita Taveta University. Participation was fully voluntary, and informed consent was sought from all respondents before data collection. Anonymity was maintained through the use of unique identification codes, and all collected data were securely stored with restricted access. Furthermore, enumerators upheld professionalism and respect in all their interactions with respondents during the data collection process.

RESULTS

A total of 384 questionnaires were issued to respondents, with 363 filled and returned. The returned questionnaires formed a response rate of 94.5% as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Response Rate

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent
Returned	363	94.5
Non returned	21	5.5
Total	**384**	**100.0**

Demographic Information Analysis

Table 2: Demographic Data

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	215	59.2
	Female	148	40.8
	Other	0	0.0
Age	18–30	41	11.3
	31–40	97	26.7
	41–50	139	38.3
	51+	86	23.7
Education Level	Diploma	50	13.8
	Bachelor's	157	43.3
	Master's	115	31.7
	Doctorate	41	11.3
Total		**363**	**100.0**

Key Findings

The descriptive analysis examined the perceptions of respondents regarding the effect of leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, policy continuity and implementation, and County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya. The findings indicated that leadership vision was the strongest-performing variable, with respondents positively rating the county governor’s clear long-term development vision and communication of priorities, although weaker scores on resource alignment, operational implementation, and citizen engagement revealed a gap between visionary leadership and its practical institutionalization The findings further showed that institutional capacity was moderate but uneven, with relatively positive interdepartmental coordination and staff competency, but significant weaknesses in financial resources, ICT infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation systems, and capacity gap identification, making underfunding the most critical constraint to effective strategic plan implementation.

The study also found that policy continuity and implementation was the weakest-performing variable, characterized by unstable policy priorities, poor project completion rates, and inadequate budgetary support for multi-year projects, despite relatively stronger leadership accountability and stakeholder monitoring mechanisms, highlighting persistent institutional discontinuity in county governance. The findings also indicate that respondents generally perceived strong coordination among county departments, alignment of development plans with county goals, stakeholder involvement, and strategic resource allocation, although weaker ratings on budget consistency and the direct impact of strategic alignment on performance suggest gaps in fully translating alignment into improved county government outcomes. Finally, the findings show that county government performance was moderate but uneven, with some perceived improvement in residents’ livelihoods and socio-economic outcomes, but significant weaknesses in project completion within timelines, financial prudence, service delivery efficiency, and public trust, indicating limited translation of strategic plans into consistent and satisfactory development outcomes.

Table 3: Leadership Vision Results

Leadership Vision (X1) — Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
The county governor articulates a clear and compelling long- term development vision.	1.9	5.8	12.4	49.6	30.3	4.01	0.896
Development priorities are communicated transparently to all county staff and stakeholders.	3.1	8.3	16.5	45.2	26.9	3.84	1.011
Resource allocation decisions are visibly aligned with stated county goals and objectives.	5.5	14.6	18.7	40.8	20.4	3.56	1.106
Vision and mission statements effectively guide day-to-day county operations.	4.4	11.8	19.3	42.7	21.8	3.66	1.067
Citizens are meaningfully engaged in defining county development priorities.	6.6	16.5	20.7	38.6	17.6	3.44	1.138
SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree; Scale: 1–5; n=363							

Table 4: Institutional Capacity Results

Institutional Capacity (X2) — Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
County staff possess the technical competencies needed for effective service delivery.	5.8	15.4	17.9	42.1	18.7	3.53	1.112
ICT infrastructure adequately supports county governance and administrative functions.	9.4	22	18.2	36.1	14.3	3.24	1.208
Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are effectively embedded in county operations.	7.7	19.3	16.5	39.4	17.1	3.39	1.179
The county has sufficient financial resources to fully implement its strategic plan.	11.3	24.8	16.5	34.2	13.2	3.13	1.242
Interdepartmental coordination facilitates efficient programme implementation.	4.7	12.9	19	44.6	18.7	3.59	1.075
Institutional capacity gaps are systematically identified and addressed by management.	6.3	17.6	20.4	40.2	15.4	3.41	1.125
SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree; Scale: 1–5; n=363							

Table 5: Policy Continuity & Implementation Results

Policy Continuity & Implementation (X_4) — Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
County budgetary allocations consistently support multi-year development projects.	8.3	20.1	15.4	38.8	17.4	3.37	1.214
Policy priorities remain stable across successive county administrations.	11.8	26.4	14.6	32.8	14.3	3.11	1.289
The county achieves satisfactory project completion rates within planned timelines.	10.2	24.2	17.4	34.7	13.5	3.17	1.257
Leadership accountability mechanisms safeguard policy implementation integrity.	4.1	11.8	17.1	44.9	22	3.69	1.063
Stakeholders actively participate in monitoring county policy progress.	5.2	13.5	18.7	43	19.6	3.58	1.094
Policy changes are transparently communicated to affected communities.	6.3	16	19.8	41.3	16.5	3.46	1.131
SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree; Scale: 1–5; n=363							

Table 6: Strategic Alignment results

Strategic Alignment (X4) — Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
County development plans are well aligned with the overall strategic goals of the county government.	1.6	6.9	18.7	47.9	24.8	3.87	1.024
Budget allocations are consistently aligned with priority development projects identified in the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP).	4.1	12.2	17.4	43.5	22.9	3.69	1.087

There is effective coordination among county departments in implementing development programs and strategic plans.	2.5	8	13.2	48.8	27.5	3.91	0.967
County leadership ensures that financial resources are allocated based on strategic priorities rather than political interests.	3.3	10.7	15.7	42.4	27.8	3.81	1.043
Stakeholders, including citizens and development partners, are actively involved in county planning and implementation processes.	2.8	9.6	14.6	44.6	28.4	3.86	1.007
Strategic alignment between leadership priorities, departmental activities, and resource allocation has improved county government performance.	7.2	18.7	21.5	36.4	16.2	3.36	1.157

Table 7: Government Policies and Regulations results

County Government Performance (Y) — Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std Dev
Public service delivery in this county is efficient and meets citizen needs.	6.1	15.7	18.5	42.7	17.1	3.49	1.103
County financial resources are managed with prudence and accountability.	9.6	19.8	17.1	38.3	15.2	3.3	1.221
County development programmes tangibly improve the livelihoods of residents.	4.1	11	16.5	47.9	20.4	3.7	1.04
Development projects are completed within stipulated timeframes.	12.1	25.6	15.7	32.8	13.8	3.1	1.289
Public trust in county governance has strengthened over successive administrations.	7.7	18.2	19.3	40.8	14	3.35	1.17
The county demonstrates measurable socio-economic development outcomes.	4.7	12.9	17.6	45.7	19	3.62	1.069
SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree; Scale: 1–5; n=363							

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is essential in determining the nature and magnitude of relationships among the variables being studied. It helps explain both the strength and direction of these associations, thereby supporting the interpretation of how the variables interact within the study framework. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, where a value of +1 indicates a perfect positive relationship, meaning that as one variable increases, the other increases proportionally. In contrast, a value of -1 represents a perfect negative relationship, showing that as one variable increases, the other decreases proportionally. A value of 0.000 indicates no relationship between the variables. Correlation coefficients between 0.001–0.250 indicate a weak relationship, 0.251–0.500 represent a moderately strong relationship, 0.501–0.750 show a strong relationship, and 0.751–1.000 indicate a very strong or robust relationship.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variable	County Gov. Performance (Y)	Leadership Vision (X1)	Institutional Capacity (X2)	Policy Continuity (X3)	Strategic Alignment (X4)
County Gov. Performance (Y)	1				
Leadership Vision (X1)	.791**	1			
Institutional Capacity (X2)	.762**	.256*	1		
Policy Continuity & Implementation (X3)	.843**	.241*	.298*	1	
Strategic Alignment (X4)	.724**	.274*	.208*	.329*	1
***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). n=363*					

Table 8 presents the Pearson correlation matrix showing the relationships between the independent variables; Leadership Vision, Institutional Capacity, Policy Continuity, and Strategic Alignment, and the dependent variable, County Government Performance. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of association among the study variables and to establish whether the relationships were statistically significant. The findings indicate that all the independent variables had positive and statistically significant relationships with County Government Performance, implying that improvements in these variables are associated with better county government performance in Taita Taveta County. Policy Continuity and Implementation (X3) recorded the strongest positive correlation with County Government Performance ($r = 0.843$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a very strong relationship. This suggests that stable policy priorities, consistent implementation of development plans, and continuity across leadership transitions play a major role in enhancing county government performance. The finding implies that counties that maintain policy consistency are more likely to achieve better service delivery, fiscal sustainability, and socio-economic development outcomes.
Leadership Vision (X1) also showed a strong positive and significant relationship with County Government Performance ($r = 0.791$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that clear leadership direction, effective communication of development priorities, and visionary governance positively influence county performance. Leaders who articulate a strong development vision are more likely to mobilize institutional support, align resources, and improve public trust and accountability. Institutional Capacity (X2) had a strong positive correlation with County Government Performance (r =

0.762, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that counties with stronger financial resources, competent staff, effective ICT systems, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms tend to perform better. This confirms that institutional strength is essential for effective policy implementation and sustainable governance outcomes.

Strategic Alignment (X4) also demonstrated a strong positive and significant relationship with County Government Performance ($r = 0.724$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that effective alignment between county development plans, leadership priorities, resource allocation, and departmental activities contributes significantly to improved governance efficiency and service delivery. The intercorrelations among the independent variables were positive and statistically significant but relatively moderate, ranging from $r = 0.208$ to $r = 0.329$. For instance, Leadership Vision and Strategic Alignment had a correlation of $r = 0.274$ ($p < 0.05$), while Policy Continuity and Strategic Alignment recorded $r = 0.329$ ($p < 0.05$). These moderate relationships indicate that although the variables are related, they are sufficiently distinct constructs and do not present serious multicollinearity concerns.

Regression Analysis

The model summary shows that the combined influence of the predictor variables; leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, and policy continuity and implementation, accounts for a significant proportion of the variation in County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.928 indicates a strong positive linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The R Square value of 0.861 means that approximately 86.1% of the variation in Taita Taveta County Government performance is explained by the predictor variables included in the model. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the Adjusted R Square is 0.859, implying that about 85.9% of the variability in county government performance can be consistently explained by these variables while controlling for possible model overfitting (Field, 2020; Hair et al., 2020). The standard error of the estimate (0.03842) indicates the average distance between the observed performance values and the regression line, suggesting a fairly good fit of the model to the observed data. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the predictor variables collectively have a strong and meaningful influence on Taita Taveta County Government performance, although approximately 13.9% of the variation remains unexplained, indicating that other factors outside the model may also affect performance outcomes (Pallant, 2020). The model summary results are presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 9: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.928a	0.861	0.859	0.03842

Table 10: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3.271	4	.818	136.33	.0000
	Residual	.528	358	.006		
	Total	3.799	362			

The ANOVA results for the regression model indicate that the overall model is statistically significant in explaining variation in the Taita Taveta County Government performance. The regression sum of squares is 3.271 with 4 degrees of freedom, while the residual sum of squares is .528 with 358 degrees of freedom, leading to a total sum of squares of 3.799. The mean square for the regression is .818, compared to a mean square for the residual of .006, yielding an F-statistic of 136.33 with a corresponding significance value of $p<0.001$. Since the p-value is less than the conventional 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis that all regression coefficients are equal to zero is rejected, indicating that the combined predictor strategic leadership transition management variables; leadership vision, institutional capacity, strategic alignment, policy continuity and implementation have a significant influence on County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government County, Kenya (M'Mugambi, 2024; Paul et al., 2025).

This indicates that although individual predictors may not each demonstrate statistical significance independently, their collective effect accounts for a substantial proportion of the variation in performance outcomes, supporting the theoretical view that several interconnected organizational factors jointly shape effectiveness (Pallant, 2020). Additionally, the findings confirm the usefulness of the regression model as a predictive instrument for explaining the influence of strategic leadership transition management practices on County Government Performance, while also suggesting the need to consider other variables or contextual factors that could further strengthen its explanatory capacity.

Table 11: Regression Coefficient Results

Variable	Unstd. B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t-statistic	Sig.
(Constant)	0.387	0.088	—	4.412	0
Leadership Vision (X1)	0.263	0.065	0.304	4.018	0
Institutional Capacity (X2)	0.231	0.063	0.267	3.694	0
Policy Continuity & Implementation (X3)	0.341	0.065	0.389	5.271	0
Strategic Alignment (X4)	0.198	0.062	0.231	3.187	0.002
a. Dependent Variable: County Government Performance (Y). n=363. Significance level: $p \leq 0.05$.					

Table 11 presents the regression coefficient results showing the individual effects of Leadership Vision, Institutional Capacity, Policy Continuity, and Strategic Alignment on County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government. The findings indicate that all the independent variables had positive and statistically significant effects on County Government Performance since all p-values were below 0.05. This means that improvements in these variables significantly enhance county government performance. Leadership Vision (X1) had an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.263$, standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.304$, $t = 4.018$, and $p = 0.000$. This indicates that a one-unit increase in leadership vision leads to a 0.263-unit increase in County Government Performance, holding other factors constant. This suggests that clear leadership direction, effective communication of development priorities, and visionary governance improve service delivery and accountability.

Institutional Capacity (X2) recorded $B = 0.231$, $\beta = 0.267$, $t = 3.694$, and $p = 0.000$, showing that stronger financial resources, human capital, ICT systems, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks significantly improve county performance. Policy Continuity and Implementation (X3) had the strongest effect with $B = 0.341$, $\beta = 0.389$, $t = 5.271$, and $p = 0.000$. This indicates that stable policy priorities, consistent implementation of projects, and continuity across leadership transitions contribute most significantly to county government performance. Strategic Alignment (X4) also had a positive and significant effect with $B = 0.198$, $\beta = 0.231$, $t = 3.187$, and $p = 0.002$, implying that alignment of county plans, budgets, leadership priorities, and departmental operations improves governance efficiency.

Overall, Policy Continuity and Implementation was the strongest predictor, followed by Leadership Vision, Institutional Capacity, and Strategic Alignment, confirming that effective Strategic Leadership Transition Management significantly improves County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County.

$$\mathbf{Y = 0.387 + 0.263X_1 + 0.231X_2 + 0.341X_3 + 0.198X_4}$$

Interpretation of Findings

The study findings show that Strategic Leadership Transition Management significantly and positively influences County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County. Leadership vision improves performance by providing clear strategic direction, enhancing accountability, and strengthening public trust, although gaps remain in resource alignment and citizen participation. Institutional capacity also positively affects performance through staff competency, interdepartmental coordination, ICT systems, and monitoring and evaluation, but inadequate financial resources remain a major challenge. Policy continuity and implementation emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that stable development priorities and consistent project implementation are essential for service delivery, fiscal sustainability, and socio-economic development. Frequent leadership transitions often disrupt strategic plans through project abandonment, duplication, and delayed implementation. Strategic alignment further improves performance by ensuring that county plans, budgets, leadership priorities, and departmental activities are coordinated toward common goals. Overall, sustainable county performance depends on strong leadership transition systems, institutional stability, and policy continuity.

Practical Implications

The study shows that effective Strategic Leadership Transition Management is essential for improving County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County. County governments should establish structured leadership transition frameworks, including succession planning, formal handover procedures, and transition policies to reduce project abandonment and policy inconsistency during leadership changes. Strengthening leadership vision is also important through clear communication of development priorities, budget alignment, and increased citizen participation to enhance accountability and public trust. Institutional capacity should be improved through investment in staff training, ICT infrastructure, financial management systems, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks to support efficient service delivery. Policy continuity requires stronger legal and administrative safeguards to protect County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) and multi-year projects from political disruption. Strategic alignment should ensure coordination between county plans, budgets, departmental activities, and leadership priorities. These measures will improve governance stability, fiscal sustainability, and sustainable socio-economic development.

Theoretical Implications

The study makes important theoretical contributions by integrating leadership vision, institutional capacity, policy continuity and implementation, and strategic alignment into one Strategic Leadership Transition Management framework for explaining County Government Performance. It strengthens Transformational Leadership Theory by confirming that leadership vision improves accountability, service delivery, and public trust through clear strategic direction. The findings support the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory by showing that financial resources, human capital, ICT systems, and monitoring frameworks are essential for sustainable county performance. The study also reinforces Policy Implementation Theory by establishing that policy continuity is the strongest predictor of performance, showing that weak leadership transitions disrupt service delivery and development plans. Strategic Alignment Theory is supported by findings that coordination between county plans, budgets, leadership priorities, and departmental activities improves governance efficiency. Overall, the study advances theory by treating Strategic Leadership Transition Management as an integrated construct rather than separate variables.

Limitations of the Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis provided useful insights into Strategic Leadership Transition Management and County Government Performance but had several limitations. It relied on means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, which summarized perceptions without establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Since data were self-reported through questionnaires, respondent bias and socially desirable responses may have affected accuracy. Descriptive statistics also could not fully capture deeper political and contextual issues such as political interference and leadership conflicts. The study was limited to Taita Taveta County, reducing generalizability to other counties. Additionally, some external factors influencing performance may not have been fully captured.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that Strategic Leadership Transition Management significantly influences County Government Performance in Taita Taveta County Government. Leadership vision, institutional capacity, policy continuity and implementation, and strategic alignment were found to be critical determinants of service delivery, fiscal sustainability, project completion, and socio-economic development. The study established that leadership vision positively affects county government performance by providing clear strategic direction, improving accountability, and strengthening public trust. However, although county leadership demonstrates visionary clarity, gaps still exist in translating vision into practical resource allocation, operational implementation, and meaningful citizen participation.

Institutional capacity was found to significantly influence performance through staff competency, interdepartmental coordination, ICT systems, and monitoring and evaluation structures. However, inadequate financial resources emerged as the greatest institutional challenge, limiting effective implementation of strategic plans and development programmes. Policy continuity and implementation emerged as the strongest predictor of county government performance. Frequent leadership transitions often result in abandonment of predecessor projects, duplication of initiatives, delayed implementation, and weak institutional memory. Stable policy priorities and continuity mechanisms are therefore essential for sustainable county performance. Strategic alignment also significantly improves performance by ensuring coordination between county development plans, budgets, leadership priorities, and departmental activities. However, weak budget alignment and political interference continue to undermine full implementation of strategic plans. The study further concludes that sustainable county government performance depends on an integrated Strategic Leadership Transition Management framework that strengthens succession planning, institutional capacity, policy stability, and strategic alignment. Without such systems, leadership transitions will continue to disrupt governance continuity and limit development outcomes.

The study recommends that Taita Taveta County Government should institutionalize formal leadership transition policies, succession planning systems, and mandatory handover procedures to minimize project abandonment, policy inconsistency, and duplication during leadership changes. County leadership should strengthen strategic communication of long-term development priorities and enhance citizen participation through inclusive public forums and stakeholder engagement. The county should also invest in human resource development, staff training, ICT infrastructure, financial management systems, and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to improve institutional capacity and service delivery. Stronger legal and administrative safeguards should be established to protect County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) and multi-year projects from political disruption, supported by stable budgetary allocations and effective implementation monitoring systems. Additionally, strategic alignment between county plans, departmental activities, leadership priorities, and budgets should be strengthened, while national institutions such as the Council of Governors, Commission on Revenue Allocation, and the Ministry of Devolution should provide stronger governance guidelines and capacity-building support for counties.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should examine additional factors influencing county government performance such as political interference, corruption, legal disputes, and national government relations. Comparative studies across multiple counties and longitudinal studies are also recommended to strengthen generalizability and long-term understanding of leadership transition effects.

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RECOGNITIONS OF THE AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Mary Wali Mngoda - Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing.

Patrick Mutua Kimaku - Supervision, refining methodology, reviewing and editing.

Karim Hassanali Omido - Supervision, validation, editing and reviewing.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Because of confidentiality considerations, the complete dataset is not publicly accessible. However, anonymized data and related supporting materials may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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